A FREE STUDY RESOURCE

Guard the Deposit

A Greek Word Study of the Letters to Timothy and Titus

By **Larry Herzog Jr.** · *Ordinary Means*

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Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the NET Bible®. Scripture quoted by permission. Quotations designated (NET) are from the NET Bible® copyright ©1996, 2019 by Biblical Studies Press, L.L.C. All rights reserved. netbible.com Greek is transliterated throughout. No knowledge of Greek is assumed or required.

A Word Before We Begin

Paul wrote three letters to two men, and the church has spent most of its history mining them for job descriptions.

That is not a criticism. The qualification lists are there. So are the instructions about widows, elders, slaves, money, and the reading of Scripture in the assembly. First and Second Timothy and Titus are the closest thing the New Testament has to a manual for running a congregation, and every generation that has had to run one has come here for help.

But reading them that way leaves the strangest thing about them unaccounted for.

The strangest thing is the vocabulary. These three short letters share a cluster of words that appears almost nowhere else in Paul, and in some cases nowhere else in Greek. Teaching is described as healthy or diseased, in the language a physician would use about a patient. Godliness — a word Paul does not use once in Romans, Galatians, Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, or Colossians — appears ten times here. Christ's coming is called an appearing rather than an arrival. Five times the writer stops and quotes something the church already says, tagging it with a formula found nowhere else in the New Testament.

And three times, twice in one letter and once in another, he uses a term borrowed from property law: the deposit.

A deposit is goods left with a neighbor for safekeeping. Not sold, not lent, not given — left, with an understood obligation to hand them back unchanged. It is a legal arrangement with a legal vocabulary, and Paul reaches into it to describe the gospel.

That word organizes the others. Once you have seen it, the medical vocabulary stops being a curiosity and becomes an argument about what happens to people when the deposit is altered. The faithful sayings stop being pious tags and become the deposit in portable form. The instructions about office stop being administrative and become a description of the kind of man you would trust with something that is not his.

These are not letters about running a church. They are letters about something handed over that has to be handed on unchanged — and every distinctive word in them serves that idea.

Why the three letters together

This study is organized by word rather than by book, and that is a departure from the four studies that precede it.

The reason is practical. Read 1 Timothy straight through, then 2 Timothy, then Titus, and the shared vocabulary disappears under three sets of occasional detail. You meet sound doctrine in 1 Timothy 1, then again in chapter 6, then again two letters later, and by then the medical metaphor has been diluted by everything in between. The pattern is there, but it is spread too thin to see.

Gathered by word, it is unmistakable. Ten sessions, each built on a cluster of related terms, each moving freely across all three letters. Session Two puts every occurrence of healthy teaching side by side with every occurrence of the disease vocabulary that answers it, and the metaphor becomes impossible to miss.

Something is lost in the trade, and it should be said plainly. You will not come away from this study with a running sense of the argument of 1 Timothy, or with the particular pastoral situation each letter addresses. That is what a commentary is for, and a good commentary on the Pastorals is a worthwhile companion to this. What a word study can do that a commentary cannot is slow down at the places where the English has quietly done your thinking for you.

What this study is not

It is not a verse-by-verse commentary. Whole passages of these letters go untreated, including some that matter, because they do not turn on a word.

It is not a technical exercise. Every Greek term is transliterated and glossed in plain English, and where a Greek grammatical point is doing real work it is explained in ordinary language. If you have some Greek, nothing here will insult you. If you have none, nothing here will be closed to you.

And it is not a book that will smooth over the hard places. Several times in what follows you will read that a translation choice was made, that the choice was reasonable, and that a different reasonable choice would have produced a different sentence in your Bible. That is not an attack on translators. It is what translation is, and readers are entitled to know where it happened.

Three of those places are worth naming now, so that nothing arrives as a surprise. Titus 3:5 is the most concentrated baptismal sentence Paul wrote, and most English-speaking Christians have been taught to hear it as a metaphor. Second Timothy 2:15, in the render-

ing most of us memorized, has been made to carry an entire system of interpretation that the Greek verb does not contain — and the correction cuts against a Lutheran habit as well as against a dispensational one. And 1 Timothy 2:12 contains a verb that occurs once in the Bible and has been argued over for decades; it is treated in Session Seven by the same method as every other contested word, which is the only way a study like this keeps its integrity.

On who wrote these letters

A reader who takes this study to a college classroom or an online discussion will meet the claim that Paul did not write the Pastoral Epistles. The claim deserves a straight answer rather than a nervous one.

The argument is largely about vocabulary — which means the very thing that makes these letters rewarding to study word by word is the main evidence marshaled against their authorship. The Pastorals use a great many words Paul uses nowhere else, and use some of his characteristic words less. That is a real observation, honestly made, and it is not a smear.

What it is not is decisive. Word statistics across a body of thirteen letters, several very short, addressed to different situations over perhaps fifteen years, are a blunt instrument; an author writing to a trusted colleague about the ordering of a church has occasion to use words he had no occasion for when writing to a congregation about justification. Ancient authors used secretaries, and gave them varying latitude. And the church received these letters as Paul's from very early, which is evidence of a different kind but evidence nonetheless.

This study receives them as Paul's and as canonical, which is where the confessional tradition stands. Readers who want the historical method rather than the conclusion will find it treated at length elsewhere.[1]

What should be said, and is not always said, is that the question does not change the study. If these letters are Scripture — and the church has confessed that they are — then their vocabulary is what we have to work with, whoever held the pen. The deposit is the deposit.

1. On the manuscript evidence and the method behind decisions like this one, see the author's Ad Fontes: To the Sources, a thirty-week course kit on the text of the Old and New Testaments.

Using this with a class

Ten sessions, and they will not divide evenly into a quarter. Session Seven is roughly twice the length of the others and will want two weeks; Sessions Five and Six belong together and can be taken in one sitting by a group that is moving well.

Each session ends with three short sections. Where people get it wrong names the common misreadings, including some that are common among people who agree with this book. So what is the part to read aloud if you only have time for one thing. If you want to go deeper points to the passages and questions a session had to leave alone.

There are discussion questions at the end of each session. They are written for adults who have not studied Greek and are not designed to elicit a predetermined answer.

One suggestion, offered from experience. Do not begin by telling a class that the study will correct something they were taught. Begin with the word, let the text do the correcting, and let people arrive at it themselves. The Pastorals are unusually blunt about how easily teaching becomes a contest, and a study of them that turns into one has failed on its own terms.

SESSION ONE

The Deposit

1 Timothy 6:20; 2 Timothy 1:12, 14; 2:2

A man is leaving on a journey and cannot take everything with him.

He carries what he owns to a neighbor's house — silver, tools, a deed, whatever will not travel — and leaves it there. The neighbor takes it in. No money changes hands. There is no sale, no loan, no gift. There is only an arrangement, understood by both men and enforceable in court, that when the traveler comes home the neighbor will hand back what he was given.

The Greek word for what was left is parathēkē.

Everything about the arrangement is defined by the fact that the goods are not the neighbor's. He may not sell them. He may not spend them. He may not — and this is the part with theological teeth — improve them. If the traveler returns and finds his silver recast into a better design, the neighbor has not done him a favor. He has failed at the one thing he was asked to do.

Paul hands Timothy a parathēkē. He does not tell him to develop it, defend its reputation, or make it relevant. He tells him to guard it.

The word

Parathēkē is a compound, and a transparent one. Para means beside or alongside; the second element comes from tithēmi, to place or to put. A parathēkē is literally a placing-beside — something set down next to someone for keeping. English legal vocabulary has bailment for the same idea, though deposit is what nearly every translation uses and is clear enough.

It appears three times in the New Testament, all three in these letters: 1 Timothy 6:20, 2 Timothy 1:12, and 2 Timothy 1:14. In all three the governing verb is phylassō, to guard — a sentry's word, not a scholar's. The related noun phylakē means a prison, or a watch of the night. Whatever guarding a deposit involves, the image is of someone standing watch over something through a period of darkness.[2]

The parent verb, paratithēmi, runs much further through the New Testament and is worth following, because it shows what kind of act a deposit is.

Ordinarily it means to set food before someone. Jesus takes the loaves and sets them before the crowd; the same gesture, a thing placed within another person's reach.

Technically it means to entrust. To whom much has been entrusted, Jesus says, of him much more will be asked. Paul and Barnabas entrust the newly appointed elders to the Lord. Paul entrusts his charge to Timothy in the first chapter of 1 Timothy, long before the noun appears at the end.

And at the cross, it is the verb on Jesus' lips: Father, into your hands I commit my spirit. Peter uses it of Christians under pressure, who are to entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

That last group matters. To make a parathēkē is an act of trust in the one who receives it. The traveler is not merely storing goods; he is saying something about his neighbor by choosing that house. When Paul hands Timothy the deposit, the handing is itself a statement.

Where the word came from

The background is legal rather than religious, and this is the key to everything the word does.

In Leviticus, the parathēkē is the property a man leaves with his neighbor, and the sin under discussion is denying that he ever received it. Exodus legislates the same situation in detail: what happens if the deposit is stolen, what happens if an animal left in trust dies, who swears what oath before whom, and what restitution is owed.

This is property law. It is about the difference between what is yours and what is merely in your hands.

Paul reaches into that vocabulary to describe the gospel. Not into the vocabulary of treasure, or of inheritance, or of revelation — all of which were available and all of which he uses elsewhere. He reaches for the word that names goods held under obligation to return them.

2. The Received Text behind the King James reads the fuller compound parakatathēkē at all three places. The meaning is unaffected — which is precisely what makes it a useful teaching case. See Ad Fontes on variants that change nothing, and on why proportion is the first discipline of textual criticism.

Where Paul uses it

The first occurrence is the last thing Paul says in 1 Timothy before the closing benediction.

O Timothy, protect what has been entrusted to you.

In Greek the line is abrupt and personal: a vocative — O Timothy — followed by five words and an aorist imperative. A long letter about elders, widows, money, slaves, and false teachers ends by compressing the whole charge into a single sentence. Whatever else the ministry is, it is this.

The second occurrence is in prison. I am convinced, Paul writes, that he is able to protect what has been entrusted to me until that day.

The confidence in that sentence is not that Paul will hold on. It is that God will. And notice the shape of the situation the word assumes: a deposit is guarded across an interval, between a leaving and a returning. Paul names the far end of the interval — that day — and the study will come back to it in Session Ten, because the interval between two appearings is exactly where the Christian lives.

The third occurrence adds the means. Protect that good thing entrusted to you, through the Holy Spirit who lives within us.

The deposit is not guarded by vigilance, cleverness, institutional machinery, or force of personality. It is guarded through the Spirit — and the Spirit is described as indwelling. The guard is posted inside the house.

The ambiguity at 2 Timothy 1:12

Honesty requires a note here, because English translations disagree and most readers never learn that there was anything to disagree about.

Paul writes that God is able to guard tēn parathēkēn mou — my deposit — until that day. A possessive in Greek can point either direction, and both are grammatically available.

It may mean the deposit I have made with him: Paul has handed his life, his work, and his approaching death over to God for safekeeping. On this reading the verse is a statement of personal trust, and it is deeply moving in the mouth of a man expecting execution.

It may mean the deposit he has made with me: the gospel Paul was given, which God himself will preserve. On this reading the verse is a statement about the survival of the message, and it prepares directly for verse 14.

Compare a few translations and you will find the disagreement in print. Both readings are theologically sound and neither is strained. The immediate context gives a mild edge to the second, since verse 14 unmistakably means the gospel entrusted to Timothy and the two verses are two halves of one thought. An edge is not a proof, and a reader who prefers the first is not making an error.

What is worth noticing is that the ambiguity is not a defect. Both readings say the same thing about who does the keeping.

Guarded by being moved

There is one more verse, and without it the whole metaphor goes wrong.

In 2 Timothy 2:2 the noun does not appear, but the verb does: And what you heard me say in the presence of many others as witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be competent to teach others as well.

Four links are visible in one sentence. Paul. Timothy. Faithful people. Others.

Read it against the instinct the word deposit naturally produces, and the correction is sharp. If the faith is goods held in trust, the obvious way to keep it safe is to keep it still — to limit access, hedge it with qualifications, entrust it only to the properly trained, and above all not to let it out where it might be damaged. That instinct is not wicked. It is protective, and it feels like faithfulness.

Second Timothy 2:2 forecloses it. Timothy guards the deposit by handing it on, to people who will hand it on further. The transmission is not a risk to the deposit; it is the mode of its keeping.

Jesus told a parable about a man who took what he had been given and buried it for safety. The master, on his return, did not admire the caution.

What the Confessions do with this

Confessional Lutherans have a peculiar relationship to the word tradition, having been accused of both too much of it and too little. The parathēkē vocabulary clarifies what is actually being claimed.

The Latin word behind tradition translates the Greek paradidōmi, to hand over — and its noun, paradosis, is the thing handed over. The receiving side has its own verb, paralambanō, and Paul pairs them: I received, and I handed on. Tradition means, exactly and

only, the thing handed over. It does not mean the thing added later, and it does not mean the accumulated habits of a congregation.

Read with that in mind, the Lutheran Confessions make a claim that is almost monotonous in its repetition: we are teaching nothing new. The Apology of the Augsburg Confession says it again and again, sometimes wearily. The Formula of Concord opens by placing Scripture as the single judge and rule, and the Confessions themselves as witnesses to how it has been understood — a receipt, not a second deposit.

That is the Reformation's self-understanding: the neighbor opening the storehouse and showing that nothing has been spent.

It cuts in both directions, which is why it is worth teaching rather than merely asserting. It cuts against a church that develops doctrine past what was handed over. It cuts equally against a congregation that treats the faith as a local product, refreshed every few years to suit the audience, its language updated, its offense sanded off. Neither is guarding a deposit. Both are recasting the silver, and both are usually doing it with good intentions.

It also has something to say about the office. Augsburg Confession XIV insists that no one should teach publicly or administer the sacraments without a proper call, and the reason is in the noun. A man in that office holds something that does not belong to him — not his to withhold, not his to modify, not his to make interesting. Read the qualification lists of 1 Timothy 3 with the deposit in view and they change character entirely, which is Session Seven's business.

And it says something about catechesis. Luther wrote a Small Catechism for households rather than a manual for clergy, and the plainness of that document was a deliberate choice, not a concession. A deposit only experts can hold has already been diminished, whatever the intention behind the limiting.

Where people get it wrong

The commonest misuse of this word runs toward defensiveness. Guard is heard as a military verb, the deposit as a position under attack, and the Christian's posture becomes that of a man on a wall. Second Timothy 2:2 is the answer, and it should be read every time 1 Timothy 6:20 is quoted.

The second misuse is subtler and more common among careful people. It is to hear guard the deposit as a warrant for treating one's own theological formation as the deposit. The tradition a person received is not identical with what Paul handed Timothy, and the Confessions themselves insist on the distinction: Scripture judges, the Confessions witness. A

man who cannot tell the difference between the deposit and his own settled habits of reading will defend both with the same energy.

Third, and running the opposite way: the word is occasionally used to argue that since the deposit is God's to keep, human faithfulness in teaching does not much matter. But every occurrence is an imperative addressed to a man. God keeps it; Timothy is told to guard it; both are said, and neither cancels the other.

So what

You did not generate your faith and you are not required to sustain it.

That is the pastoral weight of this word, and it is worth sitting with before the study goes any further. What a Christian believes was handed to him — through a mother, a catechism class, a preacher, a friend who would not let the subject drop — and behind all of those, through an unbroken line of people who received it and passed it on. It is not his achievement. It is not his opinion. It is not, in the end, even his property.

Which means it does not rise and fall with his grip on it. The man who wrote I am convinced that he is able to guard it was in prison, out of options, and near the end. He was not confident about himself.

And it means the faith is not a private possession to be curated. It was given to be given. The parent explaining the Creed to a distracted child, the teacher taking a Sunday school class through the Ten Commandments again, the friend who says the plain thing about Christ at the wrong moment — all of them are doing the thing 2 Timothy 2:2 describes, which is the only way anything has ever reached anybody.

If you want to go deeper

Three threads this session left alone.

First, Jude 3 — contending for the faith once for all delivered to the saints. The verb delivered is paradidōmi, the handing-over word. Jude's instinct and Paul's are the same instinct in two idioms, and reading them together is worthwhile.[3]

Second, 1 Corinthians 11:23 and 15:3, where Paul says he received what he also handed on. Both concern things the church already said — the words of institution, and the gospel summarized in four clauses. Session Three takes that up.

3. Jude's handing-over vocabulary is treated in Once for All Delivered, the companion Greek word study of Jude.

Third, the question this session raises and does not answer: what exactly is in the deposit? Paul never itemizes it. He assumes Timothy knows. Watch, across the sessions that follow, how much of the content turns out to be Christ — his coming, his ransom, his appearing — and how little of it is anything else.

Questions for discussion

1. Who handed you what you believe? Name a person, not an institution. What did it cost them?
2. The neighbor in the illustration may not improve the goods. Where have you seen a church try to improve the deposit, and what did it think it was doing at the time?
3. Second Timothy 2:2 lists four links: Paul, Timothy, faithful people, others. Which link are you, and who is next?
4. Paul says God is able to guard the deposit, and also tells Timothy to guard it. How do those two sit together in practice, in a congregation you know?
5. If someone asked you what is actually in the deposit, what would you say? Try it in three sentences.

SESSION TWO

Sound Doctrine

1 Timothy 1:10; 6:3–5; 2 Timothy 1:13; 2:17; 4:3; Titus 1:9, 13; 2:1–2, 8

Sound doctrine may be the hardest phrase in the English theological vocabulary to hear freshly.

It arrives pre-loaded. Depending on a reader's history it means correct, or it means ours, or it means the thing an angry man on the internet says he has and you do not. For a great many Christians who grew up in churches that used the phrase constantly, it carries a chill — the sound of a conversation about to become a test.

The Greek behind it is a doctor's word.

Hygiainō is what a physician says about a patient who is well. It is the ordinary word for bodily health; English hygiene comes from the same root. When the Pastorals want to describe true teaching, they do not reach for a word meaning accurate, or orthodox, or traditional, or handed down. They reach for the word a first-century doctor would use about a man who has recovered.

And having chosen a medical word, the letters commit to it. False teaching in the Pastorals is not merely wrong; it is diseased. The false teacher has a morbid craving. His words spread like gangrene. His hearers have itching ears. Somebody's conscience has been cauterized. The metaphor is sustained across all three letters with a consistency that is hard to miss once you are looking for it.

That changes what the phrase is claiming. Sound doctrine is not first a statement about whether the teaching corresponds to reality. It is a statement about what the teaching does to the people who receive it.

The healthy words

Hygiainō is a regular verb, and in these letters it appears almost always as a present participle functioning as an adjective: healthy teaching, healthy words, healthy faith.

The related adjective, hygiēs, is the word used in the healing narratives — the man at the pool of Bethesda is made whole, the withered hand is restored sound as the other. It appears once in the Pastorals, at Titus 2:8, of sound speech that cannot be censured. Outside these letters the verb is most at home in Luke, who uses it in its plain medical sense: those

who are healthy have no need of a physician; the centurion's servant is found well; the prodigal is received back safe and sound. Third John uses it as an ordinary letter-writer's greeting — the ancient equivalent of hope this finds you well.[4]

What is striking in the Pastorals is the spread. Health is predicated of three different nouns.

Of teaching — didaskalia — at 1 Timothy 1:10, 2 Timothy 4:3, Titus 1:9, and Titus 2:1.

Of words — logoi — at 1 Timothy 6:3 and 2 Timothy 1:13.

And of faith — pistis — at Titus 1:13 and 2:2.

It is not only the content that can be healthy. The words can be healthy, and the person holding them can be healthy. The metaphor covers the whole transaction: what is taught, how it is said, and the condition of the one who has it.

The sick words

The disease vocabulary is where the metaphor earns its keep, and it is worth setting the terms out together, because no English translation lets you see them as a group.

Noseō — to be sick. At 1 Timothy 6:4 the man who teaches otherwise is described as sick about controversies and word-battles. English versions reach for morbid craving or unhealthy interest, and they are trying to render a verb that plainly means he is ill.

Gangraina — gangrene. At 2 Timothy 2:17 the teaching of Hymenaeus and Philetus will spread like gangrene. This is a medical term of art describing tissue death that advances through a body, and it survives untranslated into English.

Kaustēriazō — to cauterize, to brand with a hot iron. At 1 Timothy 4:2, of consciences seared. Also a medical procedure, and the point of cauterizing is that the treated tissue afterward has no feeling. Session Nine takes this up.

Knēthō — to itch, to tickle. At 2 Timothy 4:3, of hearers with itching ears who accumulate teachers to suit their own desires.

That last one deserves a pause. The medical vocabulary is not applied only to teachers. It is applied to congregations.

4. The medical vocabulary of the Pastorals was noticed early. Readers who want the wider background of Luke's usage will find the healing narratives treated in Just Enough Greek, Volume One.

The word for what is taught

Didaskalia is the noun that healthy most often modifies, and it has a feature English cannot reproduce.

English has to choose. Teaching is what a teacher does; doctrine is what he teaches. Two words, two ideas, and a translator has to pick one and lose the other. Greek does not choose. Didaskalia covers the activity and the content at once.

That fusion prevents two failures simultaneously. It prevents doctrine from becoming an inert body of propositions on a shelf, separable from anyone's act of teaching it. And it prevents teaching from becoming a technique or a style, indifferent to content. In these letters you cannot have one without the other, because there is only one word.

The distribution is its own argument. Didaskalia occurs about twenty-one times in the New Testament, and roughly fifteen of those are in the Pastorals. Three short letters carry three-quarters of the word.[5]

The letters also coin a verb for its opposite: heterodidaskaleō, to teach a different thing. It appears at 1 Timothy 1:3 and 6:3 and nowhere else in Greek literature before them. Heteros means other — not merely mistaken, but other than what was handed over. The existence of the coinage tells you what these letters are worried about, and it connects the medical vocabulary directly back to Session One. A different teaching is not a rival opinion. It is a substitution in the storehouse.

Where the words fall

The first occurrence comes at the end of a hard list. Paul catalogs the people the law is for — the lawless, the ungodly, murderers, the sexually immoral, kidnappers, liars, perjurers — and closes with a general clause: and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching.

Then, immediately, verse 11: according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted.

The standard against which that entire list is measured turns out to be the gospel itself. And the verb in verse 11 is the deposit verb. In its very first appearance, sound teaching is defined by what it accords with, and what it accords with is the thing Paul was entrusted.

The clearest diagnostic passage is 1 Timothy 6:3–4. If someone teaches differently and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and with the teaching that

5. Didaskalia has a full entry in the free Greek Word Explorer at larryherzogjr.com, with its wider New Testament range and its negative uses — teachings of demons, and the commandments of men.

accords with godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing, but has an unhealthy interest in controversies and verbal disputes.

Healthy words on one side; a man who is ill on the other. And note the diagnosis. It is not that he holds wrong opinions. It is that he wants the fight.

Second Timothy 1:13 gives the standard a shape: Hold to the standard of sound words that you heard from me. The noun is hypotypōsis — a pattern, an outline, a model to be copied. Health has a form, and the form was received from somebody.

Second Timothy 4:3 is the most quoted verse in this group and the most commonly misused. For there will be a time when people will not tolerate sound teaching. Instead, following their own desires, they will accumulate teachers for themselves, because they have an insatiable curiosity to hear new things.

Look at where the pathology sits. Four verbs describe the hearers: they will not tolerate, they will accumulate, they will turn away, they will turn aside. The teachers in that sentence are supplied on demand. Whatever else this verse is, it is not a verse about somebody else.

Titus 1:9 places the requirement at the end of the elder qualifications: he must hold firmly to the faithful message as it has been taught, so that he can give exhortation in healthy teaching and correct those who speak against it. It is the only qualification in the list that concerns competence rather than character, and both halves are named — encourage, and correct — in that order.

And Titus 2:1–2 puts the whole argument in miniature. Communicate the behavior that goes with sound teaching. Then, immediately: older men are to be sound in faith, in love, and in endurance.

The same word, twice in two verses, applied first to the teaching and then to the people. Healthy teaching is teaching that produces healthy people.

What the Confessions do with this

The image of the pastor as a physician of souls is old in the Christian tradition and thoroughly at home in Lutheran pastoral theology. The German word for a pastor in his caring office — Seelsorger, one who cares for souls — and the Latin phrase behind the English cure of souls both carry the medical sense that cure has largely lost in ordinary English.

Luther's pastoral letters read like a physician's notes: diagnose accurately, apply the right remedy, and above all know the difference between the patient who needs the law and the patient who needs the gospel.

Which is why the proper distinction of law and gospel, in confessional Lutheran theology, is not a technique for producing correct sermons. It is triage. Giving the law to a terrified conscience and the gospel to a comfortable one is not a stylistic misjudgment; it is a physician handing out the wrong medicine, and the Formula of Concord treats it with exactly the seriousness that description implies.

The metaphor also supplies both a defense and a limit for the confessional concern with pure doctrine.

The defense: a physician who is casual about which drug he dispenses is not warmhearted. He is dangerous. Doctrinal indifference in a pastor is of the same kind, and the people who suffer for it are not the ones who made the decision.

The limit: a physician who enjoys the diagnosis more than the recovery has stopped practicing medicine. Both failures are real. The second is the one that quotes this vocabulary most often.

Augsburg Confession VII is the relevant restraint, and the Latin word in it is doing real work. For the true unity of the church it is enough — satis est — to agree concerning the teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. Enough marks a point at which health has been reached and further intervention becomes its own disease.

Finally, Titus 2 raises the question of which way the causality runs between healthy teaching and healthy people, and confessional Lutherans have an interest in answering it precisely. It does not run backward, from the condition of the people to the validity of the teaching; that would make the gospel's truth depend on its results, and it manifestly does not. It runs forward. Teaching that is healthy tends, by the Spirit's work through it, to produce people who are.

Which is why the Small Catechism is the shape it is. Its plainness is not a concession to the unlearned. It is a prescription written to be taken.

Where people get it wrong

The first error is to use sound doctrine as a boundary marker and nothing else — a way of sorting people rather than a way of describing what teaching does. The medical metaphor cuts against that use. A doctor who is chiefly interested in identifying the sick is in the wrong profession.

The second is to assume 2 Timothy 4:3 describes a culture rather than a congregation. It describes people who accumulate teachers to suit desires they already have, and that

market is not restricted to the heterodox. A church can collect teachers who confirm what it already thinks while every teacher collected is doctrinally impeccable.

The third error runs the other way: hearing the medical language as merely metaphorical warmth, as though sound teaching meant teaching that makes people feel better. Gangrene is in this vocabulary too. The letters are not gentle about what bad teaching does, and Hymenaeus and Philetus are named.

The fourth is to forget that these letters coin a word for teaching a different thing and never coin one for teaching too precisely. Whatever the dangers of doctrinal fussiness — and Session Nine will name them — the letters' own alarm runs in one direction.

So what

Ask a different question about the teaching you sit under, and about the teaching you give.

Not: is it correct? That question matters and it is not the one this vocabulary asks first. Ask instead: what is it doing to the people receiving it?

Healthy teaching produces people who can bear their own sins being named without despairing, and other people's without gloating. It produces patience, and endurance, and a certain steadiness under trouble — the qualities Titus 2:2 lists in the same breath as the word sound. It leaves people freer than it found them.

Diseased teaching produces an appetite. For controversy, for distinctions, for the next thing, for the feeling of being among those who see clearly. It produces people who are more certain and less kind, and it does this while every proposition remains defensible.

You can run the test on yourself, which is more useful than running it on anyone else. What has the last year of your reading and listening made you into?

If you want to go deeper

Follow the disease vocabulary forward into Session Nine, where the conscience and the myth-appetite complete the diagnosis. The four sick words in this session are not scattered insults; they are a coherent account of how a person comes to prefer bad teaching.

Then follow didaskalia sideways into Titus 2:3, where older women are called kalodidaskaloi — teachers of what is good — a compound the letters coin, in the same chapter as the charge to teach what accords with sound doctrine.

And read 1 Timothy 4:16 slowly: watch yourself and the teaching. Two objects, equal weight, and a consequence attached to both.

Questions for discussion

1. Before this session, what did the phrase sound doctrine make you feel? Be honest; the answer is usually informative.
2. Second Timothy 4:3 says people accumulate teachers to match their desires. What do you go looking for when you choose what to read or listen to?
3. Titus 2:1–2 puts sound teaching and sound people in adjacent verses. Describe someone you would call sound in faith, love, and endurance. What made them that way?
4. Paul says the false teacher is sick with an appetite for controversy. Where is the line between necessary disagreement and that appetite? How would you know which side of it you were on?
5. If doctrine is medicine, what has your congregation been prescribing lately, and what condition was it for?

SESSION THREE

The Faithful Sayings

1 Timothy 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; 2 Timothy 2:11–13; Titus 3:8

Somewhere in the first decades of the church, before there were creeds and before most Christians could have owned a book, congregations began saying certain things in fixed words.

We know this because Paul quotes them.

Five times in these three letters — and nowhere else in the New Testament — a formula appears: pistos ho logos, the saying is trustworthy. It functions the way a citation functions. It signals that what follows, or what precedes, is not the writer's own composition but something already in circulation, already agreed, already portable enough to be invoked with a tag and recognized.

This is the earliest visible catechesis in the New Testament. Not a system and not a document, but a handful of sentences short enough to memorize and weighty enough to be worth memorizing.

Which is the argument of this whole study in miniature. The deposit is not an abstraction. It has actual sentences in it, and here are five of them.

The formula

Pistos ho logos is a verbless clause — Greek supplies no is, and none is needed. Trustworthy, the saying.

Pistos is the adjective from pistis, faith. It means faithful or trustworthy, and it runs in both directions: a pistos person can be trusted, and a pistos person trusts. Applied to a saying, it means this one will hold.

Logos here does not mean word in the sense of a lexical item, and certainly not the Word of John's prologue. It means a saying, a statement, an account — the thing said.

Twice the formula is extended: trustworthy and worthy of full acceptance. The noun is apodochē, a word of reception and welcome, used in ordinary Greek of receiving a guest or accepting a claim as established. The saying is not merely reliable; it is to be taken in. Related vocabulary in the same letters points the same way. Homologia — confession, literally same-saying — appears at 1 Timothy 6:12–13, of the good confession Timothy made

before many witnesses and the one Christ made before Pilate. And homologoumenōs, confessedly, by common admission, introduces the hymn at 1 Timothy 3:16. These are all words for things said in common.

The five

The first, and the best known: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Eight words in Greek.

Paul adds a clause of his own, and it is in the present tense. Not of whom I was foremost. Of whom I am. Whatever else changed on the Damascus road, that did not, and this session will come back to it.

The second concerns the office: if someone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a good work.

The third stands in a passage about training for godliness and hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of believers.

The fourth is the hymn fragment of 2 Timothy 2:11–13, treated below.

The fifth points back at the baptismal paragraph of Titus 3, which is Session Six's business: this saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these matters.

Which way does it point

For at least three of the five it is genuinely unclear whether the formula introduces what follows or endorses what precedes, and readers deserve to know that their Bible has made a decision on their behalf.[6]

First Timothy 1:15 clearly points forward. Titus 3:8 clearly points back. The other three are contested.

First Timothy 3:1 is the sharpest case. Does the formula commend the saying about aspiring to the office of overseer, which comes after it? Or does it close the difficult paragraph about women and childbearing that comes before it? Both have been argued seriously by careful readers, and the two produce quite different paragraphs.

6. The paragraph divisions in a modern English Bible are editorial. The earliest manuscripts have neither chapter numbers, verse numbers, nor paragraph breaks; where the white space falls is a translator's judgment. See Ad Fontes on the history of the apparatus readers now take for granted.

First Timothy 4:9 is similar. The saying may be the bodily-training proverb of verse 8 or the statement about the living God in verse 10.

The point worth carrying away is not which answer is right. It is that the paragraph breaks in a modern English Bible are an editorial decision. The earliest manuscripts have no such divisions — no paragraphs, no verse numbers, no chapter numbers, and in many cases no spaces between words. Where the white space falls in your Bible is a translator's judgment about which way a formula points, and a different judgment would have produced a different reading of the passage.

That is not a scandal. It is what reading an ancient text involves. But a reader who does not know it will mistake a modern editorial choice for the shape of the text itself.

The saying that breaks its own pattern

Second Timothy 2:11–13 deserves separate treatment. It is plainly rhythmic — four conditional lines, balanced, almost certainly a fragment of something sung — and it is built to set up a break.

The first three lines run in strict parallel, and each is a mirror.

If we died with him, we will also live with him.

If we endure, we will also reign with him.

If we deny him, he will also deny us.

Three conditions, three consequences, and the logic is symmetrical. What we do, he answers in kind. The third line is genuinely severe and should not be softened; it echoes a saying of Jesus recorded in the Gospels, and the letters are not in the business of blunting it.

Then the fourth line arrives, and the symmetry collapses.

If we are unfaithful, he remains faithful, since he cannot deny himself.

The pattern would require: if we are unfaithful, he will also be unfaithful. It does not say that. The mirror breaks, and it breaks in one direction only.

The Greek makes the break audible in a way English cannot quite manage. If we are apistoumen — a-pistoi, un-faithful — ekeinos pistos menei, that one remains pistos. It is the same root as the formula that introduced the whole saying. The hymn ends by predicating of Christ the exact quality it claimed for itself.

And the reason given is not that God is lenient, or that the terms were not serious after all. It is that he cannot deny himself. His faithfulness is not a policy he might revise under pressure. It is what he is.

What the Confessions do with this

The existence of these five sayings is an argument in itself. Before there was a New Testament canon, before there was an Apostles' Creed, congregations had fixed formulations they could say together. The creeds are the same instinct three centuries later, doing the same work with more precision because more had been disputed.

The confessional Lutheran commitment to catechesis follows directly from this. Luther wrote the Small Catechism in short answers to be memorized because that is what a deposit in transmissible form looks like.

The standing objection is that memorized words are dead words. These letters supply the answer. The memorized words in question are Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners — and a person who has those eight words available at three in the morning has something that a person who must generate his own theology at three in the morning does not have.

First Timothy 1:15 is one of the great texts of the Lutheran tradition, and the reason is the last clause.

Simul iustus et peccator — at the same time righteous and a sinner — is not a slogan derived from a doctrine and imposed on the text. It is a description of what an apostle said about himself in a sentence the church was already reciting. Paul does not say he was the foremost of sinners before his conversion. He says he is.

The pastoral force of that is enormous, and it is worth stating flatly. A Christian who discovers, years in, that he is still the foremost of sinners has not discovered that his conversion failed. He has discovered what the saying already said.

And the asymmetry of the fourth saying is where Lutheran theology finds the load-bearing sentence of the whole set. Three lines establish that the terms are real; denial has consequences, and the letters do not blunt them. Then the fourth line refuses to complete the pattern.

That is precisely the asymmetry the Confessions insist on when they distinguish law from gospel. The law works by mirroring: do this and live, do that and die, and the correspondence holds exactly. The gospel does not mirror. It answers our faithlessness with his faith-

fulness, and it gives as its reason something about God's own nature rather than something about our performance.

Which is also why the third and fourth lines can stand together without either cancelling the other. The saying does not resolve them and neither should a study. It sets a real warning beside a promise that does not depend on us, and leaves the Christian holding both — which is, in the end, what it means to live on a deposit somebody else is keeping.

Where people get it wrong

The first error is to treat the faithful sayings as Paul's emphatic asides — his way of underlining something he particularly meant. The formula does the opposite. It marks the material as not his.

The second is to resolve the fourth saying by softening the third. If we deny him, he will also deny us is not neutralized by the line that follows it, and a study that uses verse 13 to erase verse 12 has made the saying say less than it says.

The third error is to resolve it the other way, treating verse 13 as though the faithfulness in question were merely God's consistency in judging. The Greek will not carry that. The line is a comfort, placed where a threat would fit, and its stated ground is God's own nature.

Fourth, and most common in practice: quoting 1 Timothy 1:15 as a description of one's past. The verb is present. Paul is not offering testimony about a former condition.

So what

You are allowed to say words you did not compose.

There is a persistent modern intuition that received language is inferior to spontaneous language — that a prayer said from a book is less sincere than one made up on the spot, that a creed recited is less real than a conviction described in your own terms. These five sayings are evidence that the earliest Christians thought otherwise, and that the apostles quoted them approvingly.

There is a mercy in this that becomes obvious the first time you need it. Faith does not always feel like conviction. Sometimes it is a person at a graveside, or awake at three in the morning, or too tired to construct anything, who says words that were handed to him and finds that they hold — not because he is holding them, but because they were true before he arrived and will be true after.

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am foremost. Say it in the present tense. It is a faithful saying and worthy of full acceptance, and it was worth memorizing before you needed it.

If you want to go deeper

Look up the other places where Paul quotes material he did not write: 1 Corinthians 11:23 on the words of institution, and 1 Corinthians 15:3–5 on the gospel in four clauses. Both use the handing-over vocabulary of Session One.

Then read the hymn at 1 Timothy 3:16 alongside 2 Timothy 2:11–13. Two fragments of early Christian song, in two letters, both about Christ, both quoted rather than composed. Session Four takes the first of them.

And consider a question this session raises and cannot settle: if the church was already saying fixed things this early, what does that suggest about the gap between the events and their formulation? It is smaller than most people assume.

Questions for discussion

1. What words of the faith do you know by heart? How did you come to know them?
2. Paul says he is the foremost of sinners, present tense, decades in. What would change if you said that sentence about yourself in the present tense?
3. The fourth saying breaks its own pattern. Read the four lines aloud and notice where you expected the last one to go. Why does it matter that it goes the other way?
4. Where have you preferred spontaneous words to received ones, and what were you assuming about the difference?
5. If your congregation had to choose five sentences to teach everyone by heart, what would they be?

SESSION FOUR

Godliness, Real and Counterfeit

1 Timothy 4:7–10; 5:4; Titus 2:11–14; 3:4–8

Ask an English-speaking Christian what godliness means and you will get a description of behavior.

Modesty. Restraint. Prayerfulness. A certain quietness. It is a word about how a person carries himself, and it has acquired a faint whiff of the antique — the sort of thing said about someone's grandmother, admiringly and from a distance.

Then you reach 1 Timothy 3:16, where Paul says that the mystērion of eusebeia is great — the mystery, in the New Testament sense of something once hidden and now disclosed rather than something obscure — and stops to quote a hymn.

The hymn is not about behavior. It has six lines and every one of them is about Christ: revealed in flesh, vindicated in spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among nations, believed in the world, taken up in glory.

Whatever eusebeia is, Paul's definition of its mystery is a short creed about the incarnation and its aftermath.

That is the discovery this session offers. In the Pastorals, godliness has content before it has conduct. It is not first a way of living that a Christian adopts; it is first something true about God that a Christian has been told. The conduct follows — these letters are emphatic that it does — but it follows, and the order is not decorative.

Which is also why the same letters can speak of a form of godliness with the power denied, and of men who suppose godliness is a way to make money. A word that meant only behavior could not be counterfeited so precisely. A word with content can be.

A borrowed virtue

Eusebeia is a compound of eu, well, and the root of sebomai, to revere or stand in awe of. To have eusebeia is to revere well — rightly, fittingly, in the manner the object of reverence deserves.

It was not a Christian coinage and not even a distinctively religious one. Eusebeia was the ordinary Greek and Hellenistic word for proper reverence as a civic and domestic virtue: reverence toward the gods, certainly, but also toward parents, toward the dead, toward

the city. Its Latin equivalent is pietas, and Roman pietas has exactly the same shape — Aeneas is called pius not because he is devout but because he carries his father out of a burning Troy. The word names an ordered set of obligations rightly kept.

The New Testament borrows a pagan virtue word and refills it. The container is Hellenistic; the contents are the hymn of 1 Timothy 3:16.

The family is worth having in view. The adjective eusebēs is used of Cornelius the centurion. The verb eusebeō appears twice, and the two uses are instructive: at Athens, Paul tells the crowd that what they revere in ignorance he now proclaims — the pagan sense, used without scorn — and at 1 Timothy 5:4, children and grandchildren are to show godliness toward their own household by caring for aging parents.

Hold on to that second one. The domestic obligation is not offered as an illustration of godliness. It is named as godliness.

Two more. Sebastos, the adjective meaning revered, was the Greek rendering of the imperial title Augustus; the vocabulary of reverence was also the vocabulary of empire. And asebeia, ungodliness, is the negation — comparatively rare in Paul, but it saturates Jude and 2 Peter, which are the New Testament's other home for this family.

The distribution

The noun eusebeia occurs fifteen times in the New Testament. Ten are in these three letters. Four are in 2 Peter. One is in Acts.

That is the entire spread. Paul never uses the word in Romans, Galatians, Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, or Colossians — and then uses it ten times in three short letters to two men.

Whatever these letters are doing, this word is central to it.

The hymn

And we all agree, our religion contains amazing revelation: he was revealed in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among Gentiles, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

The word rendered we all agree is homologoumenōs — confessedly, by common admission — which is the same family as the confession vocabulary of Session Three. Paul is again pointing at something the church already says.

Six lines. Each opens with a third-person aorist passive verb. Christ is the subject of every line and the agent of none: everything in it is done to him or about him. He is revealed, vindicated, seen, proclaimed, believed, taken up.

If the mystery of godliness is this, then godliness begins as something received rather than performed.[7]

Two observations about the shape. The lines alternate between spheres — flesh and Spirit, angels and Gentiles, world and glory — so that the hymn moves in and out of the visible and the unseen without ever settling. And it has no imperative in it. Nothing is asked of the singer.

A congregation that sang this was not being told what to do. It was being told what had happened.

The counterfeit

Set beside the hymn the two verses where godliness is faked, because the letters put them close together on purpose.

First Timothy 6:5 describes people who suppose that godliness is a way of making a profit. The noun is porismos, a business term — a means of gain. And Paul's reply in verse 6 is one of the great turns in the letters: godliness combined with contentment brings great profit.

He does not deny the premise. He redefines where the profit is kept.

Second Timothy 3:5 is the sharper one. They will maintain the outward appearance of religion but will have repudiated its power.

The word is morphōsis — a form, an outward shape. It is not a word for a fake. The same noun at Romans 2:20 means the embodiment of knowledge in the law, and there it is entirely positive. The problem in 2 Timothy is not that the form is counterfeit. It is that the form has been detached from what animates it.

7. This is the most significant textual variant in the Pastoral Epistles. The older Greek manuscripts read hos, "who was revealed in the flesh"; the Byzantine tradition behind the King James reads theos, "God was manifest in the flesh"; a smaller group reads the neuter ho, agreeing grammatically with mystery. In the manuscripts theos was routinely abbreviated as a nomen sacrum — two letters with a line above — one stroke from the relative pronoun, so both accidental and deliberate change have been proposed. See Ad Fontes for the manuscript evidence and the method.

And notice where the verse falls. It is the end of a long list of vices — lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, ungrateful, unholy, and on for several lines. A list like that seems to be building toward scandal. It culminates in respectability.

That is the pastoral center of this study, and it should be read slowly. The people described are not conspicuous sinners. They look right. The form is intact. What has gone is the power, and the loss of power is not visible from outside.

The training, and the test

None of which makes godliness passive, and these letters would not permit that conclusion.

First Timothy 4:7 says: train yourself for godliness. The verb is gymnazō — the text has the imperative, gymnaze — the gymnasium word, from which English takes gymnastics. Godliness is trained into a person the way a body is trained — by repetition, over time, without much drama.

Titus 2:11–12 states the relationship exactly. For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all people. It trains us to reject godless ways and worldly desires and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age.

Grace appeared; grace trains. The verb is paideuō; the form here is the participle paideuousa — the schoolmaster word. The training is real, it is demanding, and it is downstream of an appearing.

And 2 Timothy 3:12 supplies the test that separates the trained from the merely formed: all who want to live godly lives in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

That verse sits seven lines after the form-without-power warning, and the placement is not accidental. The counterfeit costs nothing. It is available to anyone, indefinitely, at no charge — which is precisely why it is so durable and so hard to detect from the inside.

What the Confessions do with this

Titus 2:11–12 gives the confessional Lutheran doctrine of sanctification in two sentences and in the right sequence. Grace appeared, and it trains. Not: grace will appear if we are trained.

The Formula of Concord treats good works with a kind of anxious precision that can look excessive until you see what it is protecting. Works are necessary, and they are necessary as fruit; the moment they are made necessary for salvation, the gospel has been conver-

ted into something else. The Formula argues over prepositions because prepositions are where this goes wrong.

Eusebeia is a useful test case precisely because it is so plainly a behavior word in English. If godliness in these letters had only ever meant conduct, the Pastorals would sit awkwardly beside Romans and Galatians, and a reader could be forgiven for thinking Paul had changed the subject in old age. That 1 Timothy 3:16 anchors the word in a hymn about Christ is not a curiosity. It is the letters telling the reader where to start.

Second Timothy 3:5 has a specific name in Lutheran theology, and the name is the confusion of law and gospel. When sanctification is preached as though it produced justification, what results is people who have the shape of Christian life without the thing that makes it alive. The shape can be maintained for decades — that is what makes it dangerous.

And it is why the Confessions keep returning to the terrified conscience. A conscience given the form and denied the power will eventually notice, and what it does then is a pastoral emergency.

There is a corollary here that is uncomfortable for a certain kind of confessional zeal, and it should be said rather than left for someone else to say. Doctrinal precision is itself available as a morphōsis. A congregation can hold every article correctly and deny the power. The letters do not exempt the orthodox from the diagnosis, and 2 Timothy 3:5 was not written about somebody else's church.

Finally, 1 Timothy 5:4 is Luther's doctrine of vocation with the apostolic vocabulary attached. Grown children show eusebeia by caring for their parents — not demonstrate it, not apply it; the verb makes the care itself the reverence. The ordinary offices of life are where God is served, and there is no holier stage on which a piety generated elsewhere gets displayed.

For a reader who came to the Confessions from a tradition that measured godliness by devotional intensity, that is the sentence to sit with. The Pastorals' word for reverence toward God includes paying your mother's bills.

Where people get it wrong

The first error is to read 2 Timothy 3:5 outward. It is a description of religious people, written to a pastor, about a danger inside the church. Used as a diagnosis of the culture it becomes almost harmless, which is a good sign that it has been misapplied.

The second is to hear the content-before-conduct point as a license for indifference to conduct. The same three letters coin the training verb, list the qualifications, and promise persecution to those who live godly. Order is not the same as optional.

The third is to treat 1 Timothy 6:5 as being about televangelists. Making a profit from godliness has subtler forms — reputation, standing, the pleasure of being thought serious — and none of them require a donation link.

The fourth is to make 1 Timothy 3:16 a proof text for the deity of Christ on the strength of a disputed reading. The hymn says Christ was revealed in the flesh, and that is the incarnation stated plainly on any reading. A doctrine that would fall if a variant went the other way was never resting on Scripture; it was resting on one letter.

So what

Godliness is not first something you are doing. It is first something you have been told.

If that sounds like an excuse for laxity, notice what it actually removes. It removes the possibility of measuring your standing by your intensity. It removes the anxious accounting that asks whether this month's devotional life was sufficient. And it removes the particular exhaustion of people who have been taught that godliness is a quality they generate and maintain, and who are therefore never finished.

What it leaves is a hymn about someone else, and a training that follows from it, and a household to take care of.

Here is the honest application, and it is not comfortable. The form of godliness can be kept up indefinitely, and it feels from the inside almost exactly like the thing itself. Almost. The difference shows up in what it costs — because the counterfeit never costs anything, and 2 Timothy 3:12 says the real one does.

If you want to go deeper

Read 2 Peter with eusebeia marked. Four of the fifteen New Testament occurrences are there, and the letter builds an argument out of the word that runs parallel to this one. The companion study on 2 Peter takes it up directly.

Then read 1 Timothy 3:16 aloud, twice — once with a Bible that reads who was revealed and once with one that reads God was manifest. Notice how little the difference changes, and consider what that suggests about how much weight any single variant can carry.

And follow the appearing verb from Titus 2:11 into Session Ten. Grace appeared; we wait for the appearing. The word is the same, and the Christian life is the interval between them.

Questions for discussion

1. What did you think godliness meant before this session? Where did that picture come from?
2. First Timothy 3:16 defines the mystery of godliness by quoting a hymn about Christ. If you had to define godliness in one sentence now, what would it be?
3. Second Timothy 3:5 describes a form with the power denied. What does that look like in a church that believes the right things?
4. Godliness with contentment is great gain. What have you been tempted to gain from being religious?
5. First Timothy 5:4 calls caring for aging parents godliness. What ordinary obligation in your life would you not have thought to call by that name?

SESSION FIVE

One God, One Mediator

1 Timothy 2:1–7; 4:10; Titus 2:11; 3:4

Job wanted one.

In the middle of his argument with God he says the thing the whole book is straining toward: there is no umpire between us, no one to lay his hand on us both. Two parties, an unbridgeable difference in kind, and nobody standing between them who belongs to both sides.

That is the position a mesitēs occupies. And the word is not poetic. In ordinary Hellenistic Greek it named a real office — the arbitrator in a dispute, the guarantor who stood surety on a contract, the neutral third party who held property while two others transacted. A mesitēs was somebody you hired, and the job had requirements: he must be trusted by both parties, and he must be able to bind both.

First Timothy 2:5 takes that commercial and legal word and says there is one of them.

Then it says something stranger. Having established that there is one God and one mediator between God and human beings, Paul names him — and the name comes with a noun attached. The mediator is a human being.

This session is the densest gospel paragraph in the Pastorals, and it holds three words that belong together: the mediator, the ransom he gave, and the title these letters distribute between the Father and the Son with a freedom that is doing theological work.

The paragraph

Start with the shape, because the individual words are often quoted out of it.

Verses 1–2: pray for everyone, including kings and all who are in authority, so that Christians may lead a peaceful and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.

Verse 3: this is good and acceptable before God our Savior.

Verse 4: who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. The last phrase is epignōsis alētheias, a full or thorough knowing, and it recurs across all three letters as the thing false teaching never arrives at.

Verses 5–6: for there is one God and one intermediary between God and humanity, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself as a ransom for all.

Verse 7: for which I was appointed a herald and apostle.

The argument runs downhill from prayer to theology. Pray for all — because God wants all saved — because there is one God and one mediator — who gave himself for all. The universal scope of the prayer rests on the universal scope of the will, which rests on the universal scope of the ransom.

Any reading that weakens one of those links weakens the instruction to pray that they were given to support. That is worth remembering when the paragraph gets quarried for proof texts.

The man in the middle

Mesitēs comes from mesos, middle, with an agent ending — literally a middle-man, in the neutral sense the English compound had before commerce ruined it. It occurs six times in the New Testament: twice in Galatians, once here, three times in Hebrews.

The Greek is spare to the point of severity: heis gar theos, heis kai mesitēs theou kai anthrōpōn, anthrōpos Christos Iēsous. There are no verbs. Two occurrences of heis — one — stand at the head of each clause. It reads like something quoted rather than composed, and it may well be.

The two occurrences of one are doing different work. One God is the confession of Israel; the Shema in its Greek form would be immediately audible to any reader of the Septuagint. One mediator is the Christian addition, placed in exact parallel so that the second inherits the exclusivity of the first.

And the mediator is called anthrōpos — the word for a member of the human race — not anēr, the word for a male as distinct from a female. Twice in one verse: the parties on one side are anthrōpōn, and the mediator is anthrōpos. He belongs to the class he mediates for.[8]

That is not incidental to the office. A mesitēs who belonged to only one of the parties was useless in Hellenistic law, and the same logic operates here. The incarnation is not an addition to the work of mediation; it is what makes the office occupiable.

8. For the full range, Septuagint background, and use of Christ as the second man, see the anthrōpos entry in Just Enough Greek, Volume Two, where 1 Timothy 2:5 is treated at length.

A price in place of

Verse 6 supplies what the mediator did, and it does it in a single word.

Doctrines are usually built out of sentences. Occasionally one is built into a word.

Jesus said that the Son of Man came to give his life a ransom for many — lytron anti pollōn. Two elements: a noun for the price paid to free a captive, and a preposition meaning in place of. The preposition sits loose in the sentence, and readers who dislike the idea of substitution have always had somewhere to go: prepositions have range, contexts vary.

First Timothy 2:6 welds them together. Antilytron. One word, occurring once in the Bible. Christ gave himself as an instead-of-price. The substitution is not being inferred from context; it is inside the vocabulary.

The lytron family is large and English scatters it. Lytron is the ransom price. Lytroō, to redeem, appears in this very letter group at Titus 2:14 — he gave himself to redeem us — and in 1 Peter, redeemed not with perishable things like silver or gold. Apolytrōsis is the fullest form and the one most English Bibles render redemption, which is why readers rarely notice that redemption and ransom are the same root.

The background is the world of captivity and slavery. A prisoner of war was ransomed; a slave could be freed by purchase, and inscriptions record a formal procedure in which a slave was nominally sold to a god, the price paid, and the slave went free.

That parallel is illuminating and it has a hard limit worth naming. In the manumission procedure there is a recipient of the price. In the New Testament there is not. The question of whom the ransom was paid to has been asked since the early centuries and has produced some of the worst theology in the tradition, including a medieval notion of a price paid to the devil that the Reformers had no patience for.

The metaphor names a cost and a substitution. It does not name a payee, and pressing it for one is asking a picture to answer a question it was not drawn to answer. The Septuagint points the same way: there the redeemer is God himself, and the one who pays gains nothing.

And the scope: hyper pantōn, for all. Greek has a preposition for on behalf of, and it is used here alongside the compound. The compound supplies the substitution; the preposition supplies the reach.

Two Saviors, or one title twice

The third word in this session is sōtēr, and its behavior across the three letters is one of the quieter arguments in the New Testament.

Read Titus with a pencil. Chapter 1, verse 3: the command of God our Savior. Verse 4: Christ Jesus our Savior. Chapter 2, verse 10: the teaching of God our Savior. Verse 13: our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. Chapter 3, verse 4: the kindness of God our Savior. Verse 6: through Jesus Christ our Savior.

Three times, in three chapters, the same title is applied to the Father and then within a few verses to the Son. A letter this short does not do a thing three times by accident.

Across all three letters the count is six for the Father and four for the Son. Nowhere is the reader told to keep them straight.

That matters because of where the word had been. In the Septuagint, sōtēr belongs to God emphatically and almost exclusively. Isaiah is the sharpest: a righteous God and a Savior; there is none besides me. A first-century reader formed on that verse could not hear savior applied to Jesus as a compliment.

The word had two other loud lives as well. It was applied to gods — Zeus Sōtēr, Asclepius the healer — and it was applied to rulers. Hellenistic kings took it as a title, and Roman emperors were routinely hailed as saviors and benefactors of the world. To call a crucified Galilean sōtēr in a Greek city was to use the emperor's word about a man the empire had executed.

The hard verse

First Timothy 4:10 says that we have set our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of believers.

This is the most difficult occurrence in the letters and a study should not glide past it. Three readings are seriously held.

Universal provision, particular reception. God is genuinely the Savior of all — the ransom was given for all — and believers are those in whom that saving actually lands. On this reading especially marks where the salvation is received, not a second and better salvation.

Temporal preservation, then eternal salvation. God preserves all people in this life — sōzō covers rescue, healing, and preservation as readily as it covers salvation — and saves believers eternally.

Potentially all, actually believers. A softening that most readers find weaker than the first, since the verse says God is the Savior, not that he could be.

The first is the reading confessional Lutheran theology takes, and it fits the letter's own argument: chapter 2 has already said twice, in two verses, that the scope is all. Whichever reading a person prefers, the honest observation is that this letter states a universal scope before it ever reaches 4:10. The verse is not an anomaly to be explained away.

What the Confessions do with this

Three things, and they are the reason this session is at the center of the study.

First, the exclusive particle. The Reformation's solus Christus has no clearer single text than 1 Timothy 2:5, and the Apology of the Augsburg Confession turns on it in its long article about the invocation of saints: Christ alone is mediator, propitiator, high priest, and intercessor, and Scripture nowhere directs prayer to any other.

The confessional argument deserves to be stated accurately, including the part where it is careful. The Confessions do not deny that Christians on earth pray for one another, and they do not attack the honoring of saints as examples of God's mercy — the Augsburg Confession explicitly permits remembering them in order to strengthen faith and imitate their callings. What is refused is invocation, on the ground that the office has one occupant.

Rome's reply is available and should be given fairly rather than in caricature: the Roman position distinguishes Christ's unique mediation of redemption from the subordinate intercession of the saints, which is held to depend on his mediation rather than to compete with it. The Lutheran counter is not that Roman theology is unaware of the distinction, but that the distinction does not survive contact with popular devotion, and that the New Testament nowhere models the practice. That is an argument about consequences and about silence. It should be presented as such.

Second, the two natures. The Formula of Concord's article on the person of Christ is among the most technical stretches of the Lutheran Confessions, and readers sometimes wonder what is at stake. This verse is what is at stake. If the mediator is not truly God, he has nothing to give that would satisfy God. If he is not truly anthrōpos, he does not belong to the party he represents, and his obedience is not reckoned to us. The two natures are not a metaphysical ornament attached to a simpler gospel. They are the structural requirements of the office named here.

Third, the universal will, and the tension the Confessions decline to resolve. Hyper pantōn, following God's stated desire that all be saved, is read as meaning what it says.

The Formula's article on election refuses to tidy the resulting difficulty by limiting the atonement or by positing a hidden divine will at odds with the revealed one.

The difficulty is genuine. If Christ died for all and not all are saved, something is unresolved. The Lutheran instinct is to locate the unresolved part in our knowledge rather than in God's Word, and to refuse both available tidy solutions — universalism on one side, a limited atonement on the other — because each purchases coherence by trimming a text.

This is a place where confessional Lutheran teaching is plainly not Reformed, and the disagreement should be named without heat. Careful Christians have read these same verses and concluded otherwise, and the disagreement is not about whether Scripture is authoritative.

Where people get it wrong

The first error is to read the ransom as a transaction God needed. Verse 4 has already said that God desires all to be saved; the ransom expresses that desire rather than overcoming it. God is not a creditor who could not afford to forgive.

The second, closely related, is the atonement preaching in which the Father is the obstacle and the Son the solution — an angry God placated by a merciful Son. These letters will not permit it. The same paragraph that names the mediator names God as Savior, and the letters give that title to the Father more often than to the Son.

The third is to make 1 Timothy 2:4 do more than it says. It states God's desire. It does not state an outcome, and the letters never say all are saved.

The fourth runs the other way: treating all in verses 4 and 6 as all kinds of people rather than all people. That reading exists and has serious defenders, and it should be weighed rather than dismissed — but it is a reading imported to relieve a difficulty, not one the paragraph suggests on its own.

So what

There is no ledger to check.

That is the practical force of antilytron for a Christian troubled about whether his particular sins were covered. The payment was not itemized. It was himself, given for all — which means the question of whether your name was on a list is a question the vocabulary does not entertain.

And there is one office, occupied. Not a network of intermediaries to be worked through, not a hierarchy of access, not a question of whether you have found the right approach. One God, one mediator, and the mediator is a man.

Job wanted someone to lay a hand on both parties. The answer the New Testament gives is not a better argument. It is a person, who belongs to both sides, and who paid the cost out of his own resources — which is precisely the one thing no ordinary arbitrator ever does.

If you want to go deeper

Read Galatians 3:19–20, where mesitēs is used of Moses and Paul builds an argument out of the noun itself. It is compressed and much disputed, and it will make you slow down.

Then read Hebrews 8, 9, and 12, where Christ is mediator of a better diathēkē — covenant. Hebrews frames the mediation between two covenants; 1 Timothy frames it between two parties. The two framings are complementary and neither is complete alone.

And take up Job 9:33 with 1 Timothy 2:5 open beside it. The question and the answer are shaped to fit each other with a precision that is hard to read as coincidence.

Questions for discussion

1. Paul grounds the instruction to pray for everyone in God's desire that everyone be saved. Does that change who you pray for?
2. The mediator is called a human being, not a man. Why does it matter that he belongs to the party he represents?
3. The ransom names a cost and a substitution but no recipient. What happens to the doctrine when people insist on supplying one?
4. Titus calls the Father Savior and the Son Savior in adjacent verses, three times. What is the letter doing?
5. Christ died for all; not all are saved. The Confessions leave that standing rather than resolving it. Are you comfortable leaving it standing? Why or why not?

SESSION SIX

The Washing

Titus 3:3–8

There is a sentence in Titus that a great many Christians have read for years without ever being told what it says.

It says that God saved us — past tense, completed — not on the basis of works of righteousness we had done, but according to his own mercy, through a washing of rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit. It says the Spirit was poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior. And it says the point of all this was that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs with the hope of eternal life.

Read it slowly and notice how little room it leaves. The saving is God's. The ground is mercy, not our works — stated twice, once negatively and once positively. The instrument is a washing. The washing is of rebirth. And the whole thing aims at an inheritance.

Most English-speaking readers have been taught to hear the washing as a picture of something that happened elsewhere — a symbol, an outward sign of an inward change already accomplished. That reading has to be brought to the sentence. Nothing in the Greek suggests it. Paul says he saved us through a washing, using the ordinary preposition of instrument, and the sentence does not flinch.

This is not the only place the New Testament speaks this way. It is the most concentrated, and it is the one Luther put in the Small Catechism.

The paragraph, clause by clause

The sentence does not survive being extracted, so take the whole paragraph.

Verse 3 is the frame, and it is the reason this session cannot be triumphalist. For we too were once foolish, disobedient, misled, enslaved to various passions and desires, spending our lives in evil and envy, hateful and hating one another.

The we is not rhetorical. Everything that follows is announced to people described that way, by a writer who includes himself among them.

Verse 4: but when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared. Two nouns — chrēstotēs, kindness, and philanthrōpia, love-for-humanity, from which English gets philanthropy, though the Greek emphasis is on God's love toward humans rather than ours to-

ward each other. The verb is the appearing word of Session Ten. The turn in the paragraph is an appearing, and it is God's.

Verse 5: he saved us not by works of righteousness that we have done but on the basis of his mercy, through the washing of the new birth and the renewing of the Holy Spirit.

Note the tense — he saved, completed action. And note precisely which works are excluded: works of righteousness that we have done. The exclusion is not of bad works but of good ones.

Verse 6: whom he poured out on us in full measure through Jesus Christ our Savior. The Spirit is poured — the Pentecost image, applied to individuals.

Verse 7: so that, since we have been justified by his grace, we become heirs with the confident expectation of eternal life. This is the Pastorals' one full-dress justification statement, and it arrives as the purpose clause of a sentence about baptism.[9]

That syntax is the point of the session. Justification and the washing are not two topics in this paragraph. One is stated as the aim of the other.

Rebirth, and the size of the word

Palingenesia is transparent: palin, again, plus genesis, birth or coming-into-being. A birth-again.

It appears twice in the New Testament, and the two uses are strikingly different in scale.

At Matthew 19:28, Jesus speaks of the palingenesia when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne and the disciples sit on twelve thrones. That is cosmic and eschatological — the remaking of the created order.

At Titus 3:5, the same word is attached to a washing.[10]

The background explains why the first sounds natural and the second is the surprise. Stoic cosmology used palingenesia for the renewal of the universe after its periodic destruction by fire; Jewish writers in Greek used it for restoration after catastrophe — the world after the flood, Israel after exile. In both settings the word is large. It describes the remaking of an order, not the conversion of an individual.

9. For dikaioō itself — the verb, its forensic sense, and the argument the Reformation built on it — see No Other Gospel, the companion Greek word study of Galatians. The point here is the syntax rather than the terminology.
10. The word has a full entry in the free Greek Word Explorer at larryherzogjr.com under the spelling paliggenesia, with the Stoic and Jewish background at greater length.

So is Titus borrowing a cosmic word for a personal event, as a kind of grand metaphor?

The paragraph itself suggests otherwise, and verse 7 is the clue: heirs, in hope of eternal life. What God will do to the whole created order at the last day he has already begun doing to particular people at a font. The individual's rebirth is not a metaphor drawn from the cosmic one. It is an installment of it.

The washing itself

Loutron is not the act of washing but the thing — the bath, the water. It occurs twice in the New Testament: here, and at Ephesians 5:26, where Christ cleanses the church by the washing of water with the word.

The Ephesians verse supplies what Titus assumes. The washing has a word attached to it — rhēma, the spoken word, the utterance. Water alone is a bath.

Greek distinguishes three washings that English collapses into one word. Louō is to bathe the whole body. Niptō is to wash a part — hands, feet, face. Plynō is to wash objects, especially clothing.

John 13:10 uses two of them in a single sentence, and the distinction is the point of the verse: the one who has bathed needs only to wash his feet. Whatever happened in the bath does not need repeating; what is left is the day's dirt. Hold on to that, because the Catechism's daily drowning and rising is exactly this shape.

The related verb apolouō, to wash away, appears at Acts 22:16, where Ananias tells Saul to be baptized and wash away his sins, calling on the Lord's name and at 1 Corinthians 6:11: you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified.

Anakainōsis, renewal, is the second noun in the Titus phrase. It occurs twice as well: here, and at Romans 12:2, the renewing of the mind.

One thing or two

Honesty requires a note, because the tidy English phrase most readers know reflects a construal.

The Greek reads: through a washing of rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit. That can be taken two ways.

As one thing: a single washing that both regenerates and renews, with the Spirit as the agent of the whole. This is how most translations render it and how the confessional tradition has generally read it.

As two things: a washing of rebirth, and a renewal by the Holy Spirit — two acts named side by side, the second not necessarily identical with the first.

The genitive chain permits both, and nothing in the grammar forces a decision. The difference is smaller than it first appears, since one preposition still covers both.

What is not available is a reading that detaches the saving from the washing. Whichever way the second half is taken, through a washing remains the instrument of he saved us. That clause is not in dispute.

What the Confessions do with this

Luther's Small Catechism, in its part on baptism, asks what baptism gives — and answers by quoting Titus 3:5–8 at length. Baptism is called there a gracious water of life and a washing of new birth in the Holy Spirit.

So what confessional Lutherans hear in this verse is not something they went looking for. It is the verse the tradition put in front of children.

The Large Catechism develops it at length and with visible impatience toward those who reduce the sacrament to a sign, and its argument runs through a single question: whose act is this?

If baptism is chiefly the believer's testimony to a decision, then its validity depends on the sincerity of the one baptized — and a conscience that later doubts its own sincerity has nothing to fall back on. If baptism is God's act in water and word, then the question of the recipient's sincerity, real and pastorally serious as it is, cannot unmake what was done.

Titus 3:5 is unusually clean on this. The subject of the verb is God. The object is us. The instrument is a washing. There is no clause in which the saved person does anything at all, and the one thing he might have contributed is explicitly excluded.

This is the section of the study most likely to be new to a reader from an evangelical background, and it should be read as something handed over rather than as an argument won. Here is a sentence that was in your Bible the whole time.

The Confessions are also careful about what baptism does not guarantee. Nobody is saved by having been baptized in the way a person is fed by having eaten. The gift is given and it is returned to daily — the Catechism's answer about what baptizing with water signifies describes a lifetime, a drowning and a rising every day. A doctrine that made the font a transaction closed in infancy would be as far from the Catechism as one that made it a symbol.

Where people get it wrong

The first error is triumphalism, and it is the one this study is most likely to produce. A sacramental theology held as a mark of superiority over other Christians has misread the very paragraph it stands on, because the paragraph opens by calling its readers foolish, disobedient, hateful, and hating one another — and the writer counts himself in.

The second is to hear he saved us through a washing as though the water worked mechanically, apart from the word and apart from faith. The Confessions say the opposite as loudly as they say anything: without the word, the water is water. Ephesians 5:26 is the guard, and so is 1 Peter 3:21, which says baptism saves and then immediately specifies that it is not the removal of dirt from the flesh.

The third is the mirror image, and it is the more common one in English-speaking Christianity: reading the washing as a symbol of a prior inward event, which requires importing into the sentence a distinction it does not make.

The fourth is treating the font as a completed transaction. The Catechism will not have it, and neither will the paragraph, which ends by pointing forward to an inheritance not yet received.

So what

Something was done to you, on a date, by someone else.

That is the comfort here, and it is a strange comfort to a mind trained to look inward for assurance. The question is not whether you felt anything, meant it sufficiently, or have kept up your end. The question is whether God did what he says he did — and the sentence in Titus is entirely in the past tense with God as the subject.

For the Christian who wakes at three in the morning wondering whether any of it took, the Catechism's answer is not introspection. It is a fact outside you: you were washed, with water and a word, and the one who did it has not changed his mind.

And the paragraph gives you somewhere to stand that is not your own progress. Verse 3 says what you were. Verse 5 says what he did. Verse 7 says what you now are: an heir, in hope. Nothing in between depends on how the week went.

If you want to go deeper

Read the Fourth Part of the Small Catechism alongside Titus 3, and notice how much of the Catechism is quotation.

Then read 1 Peter 3:20–21, where the same claim is made in a letter nobody attributes to Paul, and where the guard against superstition is attached in the same breath as the claim itself. The guard is worth as much as the claim.

And follow the appearing verb of verse 4 forward into Session Ten. The kindness of God appeared; grace appeared; we wait for the appearing. The three occurrences bracket the whole Christian life.

Questions for discussion

1. What were you taught that Titus 3:5 means? Where did you learn it?
2. The verse excludes works of righteousness that we have done — good works, not bad ones. Why is that the harder exclusion?
3. Verse 3 describes the people being addressed. Why does the paragraph begin there?
4. If baptism is God's act rather than your testimony, what changes about how you would comfort someone who doubts their conversion?
5. The Catechism says baptism means a daily drowning and rising. What would that look like this week?

SESSION SEVEN

Office and Hands

1 Timothy 2:11–15; 3:1–13; 4:14; 5:17–22; 2 Timothy 1:6; Titus 1:5–9

Read the qualification list in 1 Timothy 3 as though you had never seen it, and the striking thing is how little is required.

Not eloquent. Not learned. Not visionary, magnetic, or gifted. The list asks for a man who is not a drunk, does not hit people, is not greedy, manages his own household, has a decent reputation among people outside the church, and can teach. One item concerns competence. The rest describe a person who is, in the most ordinary sense, trustworthy — the kind of man about whom nothing especially needs to be said.

That is not a low bar accidentally set. It is exactly the bar you set when what you are handing over is not yours.

A bailment requires one thing of the man who takes the goods in: that he can be trusted to hand them back. He does not need to be impressive. He needs to be the sort of person who does not spend other people's money.

This session is the longest in the study, and it is longest because it contains the two phrases people fight about. They are treated here by the same method as every other contested word in this book. That is the only arrangement that keeps a study like this honest, and it is worth saying at the outset that the method comes first and the conclusions follow from it, rather than the other way round.

Three words, and one of them is Christ's

Episkopos is epi, over, plus a root meaning to look — an overseer, one who looks over. English bishop is this word worn down through Latin and Old English. It was an ordinary administrative title in the Greek world: an inspector, a supervisor of public works, a financial officer of a temple or a city. The Septuagint uses it of appointed officers. It carried no cultic freight whatever.

Presbyteros is grammatically a comparative — from the word for an old man, so literally older. An elder. Elders governed in Israel from the wilderness onward, and the synagogue of the first century was administered by them. When Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in every church, nobody had to ask what an elder was.

Diakonos is a servant or attendant. In ordinary Greek it is a domestic word — someone who waits on tables, runs errands, carries out another's instructions. It has none of the dignity of the other two.

It is also the word Christ used of himself. Whoever wants to be great among you must be your diakonos; and the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many — the ransom of Session Five, attached to the servant word.

Once again the church's vocabulary is borrowed. A legal term for the deposit, a medical term for doctrine, a municipal term for the overseer, a household term for the deacon. Almost nothing in these letters was coined for the purpose.

The same men, three verses apart

Before anything else in this session, one structural datum, because it disciplines everything after.

Titus 1:5 tells Titus to appoint elders — presbyterous — in every town. Verse 6 describes the man who qualifies. And verse 7 gives the reason: for the episkopos must be above reproach.

The same men. Two words. Three verses apart.

Acts 20 does the same thing. Paul summons the elders of the Ephesian church, and then tells them that the Holy Spirit has made them overseers to shepherd the church of God.

Whatever developed later — and a great deal developed later — the New Testament does not yet distinguish these as two orders. A word study has to say so plainly, including to readers whose polity assumes otherwise, and including where the study's own tradition might prefer a different answer.

Note also that Philippians is addressed to the saints together with the overseers and deacons — plural overseers, in a single city. And Titus is told to appoint elders town by town, again plural. The pattern assumed is several elders in each place rather than one man per congregation.[11]

Hands

The office is given, from outside the man, by other people's hands.

11. Each of these three office words has a full entry in the free Greek Word Explorer at larryherzogjr.com, with the wider New Testament range and the Septuagint background. This session treats them only as far as the Pastorals' own argument requires.

First Timothy 4:14: do not neglect the gift you have, given to you and confirmed by prophetic words when the elders laid hands on you. The phrase for the act is epithesis tōn cheirōn, a placing-on of hands. The noun for the elders here is presbyterion — the council, acting as a body.

Second Timothy 1:6: rekindle God's gift that you possess through the laying on of my hands.

Both verses attach a charisma to an occasion. And charisma is worth a moment, because English has drifted badly. The word now means personal magnetism, and spiritual gift in ordinary Christian usage means an aptitude discovered by looking inward, perhaps with the help of an inventory.

The Greek says something else. The suffix on charisma marks the result or product of an action, built on charis, grace. A charisma is a thing graced — the concrete outcome of favor shown. The word's own form rules out an earned capacity, and Paul uses it elsewhere of eternal life itself, and even of celibacy and marriage as states of life. Nobody discovers celibacy on an inventory.

Timothy did not find his gift. He was given it, at an identifiable moment, by men who put their hands on him while something was said aloud. There is a date. There were witnesses.

Two small notes for honesty. The prepositions differ between the two verses — the gift came with the laying on of the elders' hands in one and through the laying on of Paul's hands in the other. That difference has been used to argue that the elders merely attended while Paul actually conferred, which is more weight than two prepositions in two letters will carry. The plainer reading is that Paul acted together with the elders and describes the same event from two vantage points.

And the verb in 2 Timothy 1:6, anazōpyreō, means to fan back into flame. It occurs once in the New Testament. The image concedes that a real gift can go cold, and insists that going cold is not the same as never having had it — which is a distinction of enormous pastoral value to anyone who has wondered whether a call was genuine because it no longer feels like one.

The character words

Now the lists themselves, before the contested phrase inside them.

Above reproach — anepilēmptos, literally not able to be laid hold of, a wrestling image: there is no grip on him. Titus uses a near synonym, anenklētos, not accusable.

Then the self-command words. Sober. Self-controlled — sōphrōn, a word for a mind in its right order. Respectable. Not given to much wine. Not violent, but gentle. Not quarrelsome. Not a lover of money.

Then household: manages his own household well, with children under control.

Then reputation: well thought of by those outside — which is a striking requirement, since the outsiders in question were not Christians and had no stake in the church's success.

Then maturity: not a recent convert, lest he become puffed up. The verb is the smoke word of Session Nine — inflated with vapor.

And exactly one item of competence: didaktikos, able to teach. Titus 1:9 expands it into the fullest statement of the teaching requirement in the New Testament — he must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as taught, so that he can both exhort in sound teaching and refute those who contradict. Both halves, in that order.

The deacon's list, a few verses later, is instructive by contrast: dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain, holding the mystery of the faith with a clean conscience, and tested first. There is no teaching requirement at all. What is asked is honesty with money and honesty in speech — precisely what you would ask of someone handling the congregation's resources and its widows.

Read as a group, these are not the qualifications of an exceptional man. They are the qualifications of a man you would leave your house keys with.

A one-woman man

Inside the overseer's list, and again in the deacon's, and again in Titus, stands a phrase — mias gynaikos andra — that is word for word of-one-woman man. Greek puts one woman first, emphatically.

Five readings have been seriously proposed, and each deserves its evidence stated rather than dismissed.

That it prohibits polygamy. Straightforward, and closest to what the words literally describe. The difficulty is circumstantial: polygamy was not a live practice among Greeks and Romans of the period, and the same phrase reversed at 1 Timothy 5:9 could hardly be prohibiting polyandry.

That it prohibits remarriage after divorce. Widely held, and it takes seriously that divorce and remarriage were common and contested. The difficulty is that the phrase does not mention divorce, and Paul discusses divorce elsewhere in language nothing like this. That it prohibits remarriage after a spouse's death. Modern readers dismiss this quickly, and

they should not. It was the reading of a substantial part of the early church — Tertullian is the sharpest witness — and its holders were considerably closer to the idiom than we are. Its difficulty is Paul's own explicit permission for widows to remarry, including in this very letter, where younger widows are told to marry.

That it requires marital fidelity — a one-woman man as a description of character rather than of marital history. The reading most modern translations favor, and the one that treats the phrase as an idiom rather than a rule.

That it requires the officeholder to be married. This runs hard into 1 Corinthians 7 and into the apparent circumstance of Paul himself, and few hold it.

The decisive piece of evidence is fifty verses later, in the same letter, and most discussions never mention it.

First Timothy 5:9 says an enrolled widow must be a one-man woman. The identical idiom, gender-reversed, applied to a woman who by definition no longer has a husband.

That parallel does real work. It makes the must-be-married reading nearly impossible, since the widow is not. It puts hard pressure on the remarriage-after-widowhood reading, because if the phrase disqualified a remarried widow it would equally have to disqualify a widow for having been married once and no longer being so — and the natural sense of the parallel is that it describes her marriage rather than counting her marriages. And it fits the fidelity reading cleanly in both places.

So the fidelity reading is the most probable, and it is the one this study takes.

Two things should be said with it. First, the phrase is an idiom, and idioms resist the precision that church constitutions demand of them; a great deal of pastoral practice has been built on a construal rather than a certainty, and the people whose lives that practice has shaped deserve to know it.

Second, this is not the lower standard it may appear to be. A rule about marital history can be checked from a file. That a man's marriage should be beyond comment cannot be checked at all, and it is a harder thing to satisfy.

One verb, no second opinion

Every other word in this study can be checked against itself. The deposit appears three times, godliness ten, the appearing five. When a word occurs more than once the reader has leverage: the passages interrogate each other, and a reading that works in one place but fails in another is exposed.

Authenteō appears once.

One occurrence, in one clause, in one verse — 1 Timothy 2:12 — and that clause has probably generated more argument per syllable than any other in the Pauline corpus. There is no second passage to check it against, no earlier letter where Paul used it differently. There is a small body of occurrences in other Greek authors, most of them from centuries on either side of Paul, and scholars who have read all of them in the original disagree about what they show.

What follows will spend an unusual amount of space on what the evidence does not establish. That is not throat-clearing. A study that promises to flag translation choices honestly has to be willing to do it where smoothing would be most convenient — and where the convenience runs in the direction of the author's own convictions.

What the word can mean

The noun behind the verb is authentēs, and its history is the reason this is difficult.

In classical Attic — Aeschylus, Euripides, Herodotus — authentēs most often means a murderer, and specifically one who kills with his own hand or kills within his own family. That is genuinely the dominant classical sense and it is startling to meet.

It is also almost certainly irrelevant to Paul, and this should be said clearly because the observation is sometimes deployed as though it settled something. Words move. By the Hellenistic period the noun had drifted toward one who acts on his own authority, then toward master or doer, and it is that later field, not the tragedians', that stands behind the verb in the New Testament era. English authentic descends from the same root, by way of what is original or firsthand.

Two readings of the verb are live in current scholarship. A third was prominent a generation ago and has been largely abandoned; it is named here because readers will still encounter it.

To exercise authority over — neutral. On this reading the verb describes the ordinary exercise of authority, carrying no built-in judgment about whether the authority is legitimately held or well used. The clause then prohibits a woman from teaching and from exercising authority over a man, without any implied improperly. This is the reading of most modern English translations. Its main support is that several surviving occurrences are plainly neutral or positive, so a negative sense has to be read in from context rather than found in the word.

To domineer, to usurp, to seize authority — negative. On this reading the verb carries its own pejorative freight: to act high-handedly, to arrogate authority to oneself. The clause then prohibits something narrower — not a woman teaching or holding authority, but a

woman domineering. The King James renders it usurp authority over, and the Latin and several early versions lean the same way, which is not nothing: those translators were closer to the living language than we are. Its support is the self-derived sense at the root of the word, the fact that the surrounding verses concern disruption, and the question of why Paul avoided the ordinary Greek verb for exercising authority.

To engage in fertility rites or similar cultic senses. Proposed in the late twentieth century on the basis of the noun's associations in certain religious contexts. It attracted attention and has not held up; the lexical evidence is now regarded as weak across the theological spectrum, including by many who hold the broader position it was offered to support. It should be named and set aside rather than quietly ignored.

The argument that actually carries weight

It is not the lexical one. It is grammatical, and readers should know that, because most popular treatments of this verse spend all their energy on the dictionary.

The clause says: I do not permit a woman to teach, nor to authentein a man. Everything turns on how that nor joins the two infinitives.

One line of argument holds that the connective joins two activities viewed alike — both positively or both negatively, never one of each. Since to teach is plainly a good and ordinary activity in these letters, being what Timothy is commanded to do and what qualified elders must be able to do, the verb joined to it should also be neutral. On that argument the neutral reading wins on syntax even if the lexicon is ambiguous. The opposing line holds that the two infinitives form a single idea expressed with two words, so that the phrase means something like to teach in a domineering manner — a prohibition against a manner of teaching rather than against two separate activities.[12]

Neither construction argument has produced a consensus, and readers should be suspicious of any summary — including summaries written by people they agree with — that presents this as settled.

12. The modern discussion runs chiefly through H. Scott Baldwin's catalog of the surviving occurrences, Andreas Köstenberger on the syntax of the connective, and Philip B. Payne, Linda Belleville, and Al Wolters arguing the lexical and grammatical questions from differing directions. Catherine Kroeger's cultic proposal is the one now generally set aside. Readers who intend to form a settled view should read at least one careful advocate on each side rather than a summary by someone who agrees with them.

The context, and the strongest objection

Three details in the Greek of the verse deserve flagging before the context.

The verb permit is present tense and first person: I do not permit. Some read the present as marking a standing rule, others as marking Paul's practice in a particular situation. Greek present tense does not settle this by itself, and this is a genuine ambiguity rather than a manufactured one.

The words for woman and man can equally mean wife and husband. Greek does not distinguish, and context decides.

And the word rendered quiet is hēsychia, not the word for silence used in 1 Corinthians 14. It means quietness, settledness, an absence of disturbance — the same word used positively in this very letter of the quiet life all Christians are to pray for. Whatever verse 12 requires, it is not muteness.

Now the context, which is load-bearing. Verses 13 and 14 ground the instruction not in anything about Ephesus but in Genesis: Adam was formed first, and it was the woman who was deceived. Instructions grounded in creation are ordinarily harder to confine to one city than instructions grounded in circumstance, and this is the strongest argument against reading verse 12 as a purely local ruling.

The serious counter-argument deserves its full strength here rather than a caricature, and a reader who cannot state it should not be confident about the verse.

Ephesus was the home of the temple of Artemis. This letter is visibly preoccupied with false teaching from its opening paragraph, with myths and genealogies, and with particular women who had been drawn into it — 1 Timothy 5 says so directly, and 2 Timothy 3 describes teachers who make their way into households and capture women. On this reading Paul's appeal to Genesis is corrective of a specific error about origins circulating among those women, not a general ordinance. And there is a parallel that gives the argument real force: at 2 Corinthians 11:3 Paul invokes Eve's deception to warn an entire congregation, men included, without deriving any gender-specific rule from it.

That is a real argument, made by careful readers who take Scripture as authoritative, and a study that does not state it at full strength has not earned the right to disagree with it.

Where this study stands, and on what

The confessional Lutheran reading takes verse 12 as addressing the public office of preaching and its authority, and holds that this office is given to men.

The grounds should be stated precisely, because the position is often defended on grounds that will not hold.

It does not rest on winning the lexical argument about authenteō, and it would be in poor shape if it did. A verb occurring once, with a contested range, cannot bear the weight of a church practice. A study that presents the Greek as settling the matter is doing exactly what Session Eight criticized in the popular handling of cutting straight — resting true doctrine on a word that cannot carry it.

What the position actually rests on is cumulative: the grounding of the instruction in creation rather than circumstance; the immediate transition in chapter 3 to qualifications for the office that presume a man; the parallel restriction in 1 Corinthians 14, which is not vulnerable to the same lexical uncertainty; and the practice of the church across its history until recently.

That is a real argument and it should be made as one, which means acknowledging that each element has been contested and that the case is cumulative rather than decisive at any single point.

It is equally important to say what the verse does not decide. It does not address whether women may teach other women or children — Titus 2:3 not only permits this but commands it, and coins a word for women as teachers of what is good. It does not address whether women may speak in the assembly, hold non-pastoral offices, run schools, write theology, or possess teaching gifts. Being precise about scope is not a concession. It is the difference between reading a text and using one.

And one more thing, which some readers will find unnecessary and others will find essential. Confessional Lutheran bodies do not all practice the same thing here. Several hold to a male pastorate on the grounds above; others ordain women, and they do so with argument rather than by drift. Presenting the Lutheran view as though the question had never been contested among Lutherans would be a small dishonesty of exactly the kind this study exists to avoid, and readers who know the landscape will notice.

So: this is where the confessional tradition has stood, and these are its grounds. It is also a place where serious Christians reading the same Greek have concluded otherwise, and the disagreement is not usually about whether Scripture is authoritative. Saying that costs nothing worth keeping.

Saved through childbearing

Verse 15 cannot be skipped once verses 11 to 14 are on the table, and it is one of the genuinely difficult verses in the New Testament: she will be delivered through childbearing, if she continues in faith and love and holiness with self-control.[13]

A study should say that the verse is hard and resist tidying it. Whatever it means, it cannot mean that a woman's salvation is earned by bearing children, because that would contradict the letter Paul wrote to Galatia, the paragraph in Titus 3 that Session Six worked through, and the faithful saying in this very letter that Christ came to save sinners.

Back to the deposit

The office exists because something was handed over.

That is why the qualification lists read as they do. They describe a keeper, not a class. There is nothing in them about vision, charisma in the modern sense, or the capacity to build anything, and there is exactly one line about competence. What is asked for is a man who will not spend what is not his.

And it is why the office is conferred by hands rather than claimed. A man does not appoint himself trustee. He is appointed, in public, by people who take responsibility for the appointment, and the gift attaches to that occasion rather than to his sense of himself.

Second Timothy 2:2 remains the point of the whole thing: what you heard from me, entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others. The office is one link in that sentence. It is not the sentence.

What the Confessions do with this

Augsburg Confession V says that to obtain faith God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments. Article XIV says no one should teach publicly or administer the sacraments without a rightly ordered call. Article XXVIII distinguishes the power of bishops — the power of the Word, exercised without human force — from civil authority.

The confessional Lutheran doctrine of the ministry is unusual in what it refuses to do. It does not derive the office from the congregation's delegation of its collective priesthood,

and it does not derive it from an unbroken chain of hands. It derives it from Christ's institution of the means of grace, which require someone to administer them publicly. The office exists because the deposit exists and has to be distributed.

On bishops and presbyters, the Confessions say directly what Titus 1 shows lexically. The Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope argues that bishop and presbyter are not two orders by divine right — citing Jerome, who had made the same argument from the same texts a millennium earlier — and that the distinction arose by human arrangement. What follows for practice is less than partisans on either side usually want. It does not abolish the office of bishop, and Lutheran churches that have bishops are not thereby unconfessional. It means that where a church has bishops it has them by human arrangement for good order, and that the claim that ordination requires them is the claim the Confessions deny.

On ordination itself, the Apology goes as far as this: if ordination is understood with reference to the ministry of the Word, the Lutherans are willing to call it a sacrament, since the ministry of the Word has God's command and glorious promises. That is a carefully placed sentence doing two things at once. It refuses the medieval account in which ordination confers an indelible character making a man a sacrificing priest. And it declines to reduce ordination to a congregation's administrative arrangement, because the New Testament attaches a gift to those hands.

And Article VIII supplies what a congregation most needs: the Word and sacraments are efficacious because of Christ's institution and command, even when administered by unworthy men. This is not a loophole. It is the reason a Christian's assurance does not fluctuate with his pastor's sanctification — and it is the other half of the qualification lists. The man holding the deposit needs only to be someone who will hand it back, because the deposit is worth what the depositor put into it.

Finally, and it belongs here rather than in a footnote: whatever is concluded about the office, Galatians 3:28 is affirmed rather than managed. There is neither male nor female in Christ; baptism makes no distinctions and confers no grades of membership. Any reading of 1 Timothy 2:12 that requires Galatians 3:28 to be softened has already gone wrong, and confessional Lutherans should be the first to say so rather than the last.

13. The main readings: that women are preserved through the experience of childbearing rather than saved by it; that the article on the noun points to the childbearing — the birth of Christ; that the verse concerns spiritual well-being in the ordinary vocation of motherhood; and that it counters an ascetic teaching forbidding marriage, which 1 Timothy 4:3 shows was in circulation. Each has difficulties. None is obviously right.

Where people get it wrong

The first error is to treat the office as a rank. If it were, a restriction on it would be a statement about the worth of those excluded. The Lutheran doctrine of vocation refuses the premise: the pastoral office is one calling among many, held by a man who did not choose it for himself and does not own what he administers. There is no status in a trusteeship.

The second is to argue this question from a lexicon. Both sides do it. A hapax with a contested range will not settle a matter of church practice, and treating it as though it did produces confident people who cannot say what their confidence rests on.

The third is to overstate the scope of what is restricted. The same letters coin a word for women as teachers of what is good and command the practice. A reading that cannot accommodate Titus 2:3 has not been thought through.

The fourth is to read the qualification lists as an achievement ladder. They describe an unremarkable man, and a congregation that reads them looking for an exceptional one will be disappointed by how modest they are and will probably appoint the wrong person.

The fifth is to forget that these are the qualifications the church is told to require, not the qualities that make the ministry effective. Article VIII is emphatic that the efficacy is elsewhere.

So what

If you hold the office, the lists are a relief before they are a burden.

You are not asked to be remarkable. You are asked to be the sort of man whose household is in order, who does not drink too much, who is not in it for money, who does not need to win, and who can teach. That is a demanding list in its way, and it is not a heroic one. Nothing in it requires a personality you do not have.

And when the gift goes cold — as it does, and the letters assume it does — the instruction is not to check whether it was ever there. It is to fan it back into flame, and to remember the hands.

If you do not hold the office, the practical question this session leaves is smaller than the arguments around it. Who in your congregation is holding the deposit, and are you making that possible or making it harder? The letters spend as much time on how a congregation treats its elders — double honor, material support, an evidentiary standard before an accusation is even heard — as on the qualifications themselves.

And for anyone reading this session with a stake in the contested questions: hold the conclusion and the confidence separately. It is possible to believe a thing, to be able to say what it rests on, and to know which parts of the case are strong and which are cumulative. That is not weakness. It is the only kind of conviction that can survive a serious objection, and this passage will keep producing serious objections.

If you want to go deeper

Read Acts 20:17–38 in one sitting. It is the fullest picture in the New Testament of what an overseer was for, and it is a farewell rather than an argument.

Then read 1 Peter 5:1–4, where Peter introduces himself to elders as a fellow elder, calls the flock an allotment — the deposit idea again, applied to people — and forbids lording it over them with the same verb Jesus used of Gentile rulers.

On the contested verses, read a careful advocate on each side rather than a summary. If you finish only able to state your own position, you have not finished.

And read Titus 2:1–5 immediately after 1 Timothy 2:11–15, in that order. The two passages are usually kept apart, and they were written by the same hand to the same purpose.

Questions for discussion

1. The qualification list asks for an unremarkable trustworthy man. How does that compare with what churches actually look for?
2. The gift came through hands, on a date, with witnesses. Why might that matter more than an inward sense of calling?
3. This session says the confessional position does not rest on the meaning of one verb. What does it rest on, and which part of that case do you find strongest?
4. State the reading you do not hold, in its strongest form, well enough that someone who holds it would recognize it. What did that exercise change?
5. First Timothy 5 tells a congregation how to treat its elders. What would change in yours if that chapter were followed?

SESSION EIGHT

God-Breathed

2 Timothy 2:15; 3:14–17; 1 Timothy 4:13; 5:18

The doctrine of Scripture has been argued over for four centuries, and the verse everyone reaches for contains a word that appears exactly one time in the Bible.

That is not a scandal, but it should slow us down. A word used once cannot be triangulated against its other uses. There is no second passage to check it against, no development across a corpus, no author using it differently in an earlier letter. Whatever theopneustos means has to be got at through its parts, its background, and the single sentence it stands in.

And that sentence is itself the site of an old translation dispute — not about whether Scripture is inspired, which the sentence assumes rather than argues, but about where the word is belongs. Most modern translations have quietly settled it in a way that reads well and may not be right.

This session takes two words. The first is about where Scripture came from. The second is about what a man is supposed to do with it, and it has been made to carry a weight it cannot bear — by two traditions, one of which is ours.

Breathed out

Theopneustos is a verbal adjective compounded from theos, God, and the root of pneō, to breathe or blow.

Greek verbal adjectives ending this way are ordinarily passive in force. Gnōstos means known. Agapētos means beloved. Eklektos means chosen. On the ordinary pattern, theopneustos means God-breathed in the sense of breathed out by God — not God-breathing in the sense of conveying God's breath to the reader.

The distinction matters more than it looks. The passive sense locates the divine action at the origin: Scripture is what God breathed out. The active sense would locate it at the point of reception: Scripture is what breathes God into you. Both are true theologically, and Lutherans have a great deal invested in the second. Only one of them is what the word says, and building the second on this word rather than on the many texts that teach it directly is the same mistake this session will identify in the next section.

The word was available in Hellenistic Greek before the New Testament — used of dreams thought to come from a god, and of certain properties attributed to divine agency. That background confirms two things and should not be pressed for a third. It confirms that the word existed, and that it meant originating from a god rather than inspiring. It does not import a pagan theory of ecstatic possession into 2 Timothy, and Paul's sentence gives no hint of one. The prophets of Israel remained entirely themselves while they wrote, which anyone can verify by reading two of them in a row.

Three times God breathed

The verb behind the compound has a family worth seeing, because the New Testament puts three moments of divine breathing in deliberate relation.

Pneuma is breath, wind, and spirit. That the New Testament's word for the Holy Spirit is the ordinary word for breath is not a pun; it is a doctrine, and the Nicene Creed's title for the Spirit — the Lord and giver of life — is built on it.

Emphysaō, to breathe into, is not a cognate but is the theological neighbor. It is the Septuagint's verb at Genesis 2:7, where God breathes into the man's nostrils and he becomes a living being. And it is John's verb at John 20:22, where the risen Christ breathes on the disciples and says, receive the Holy Spirit — and what immediately follows is the authority to forgive sins.[14]

Three moments. God breathes and there is a man. God breathes and there is a Scripture. Christ breathes and there is a church with something to say.

The Genesis parallel is worth pressing, because it settles a question people bring to the doctrine of inspiration. The dust in Genesis 2 is really dust. It does not stop being dust, and it does not become alive by being well arranged. It becomes alive because God breathed. In the same way, ink and papyrus and a human author's vocabulary and circumstances and temperament are all really present in Scripture — the differences between Amos and Isaiah are not cosmetic — and none of them accounts for what the thing became.

Where the verb goes

Now the dispute, which readers deserve to know about.

14. John's use of this scene, and of the breath vocabulary generally, is treated in That You May Believe, the companion Greek word study of John.

The Greek of 2 Timothy 3:16 contains no verb. Greek routinely omits is, and the reader must supply it. Where he supplies it produces two different sentences.

All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable. The predicate reading. Two assertions are made about all Scripture: it is God-breathed, and it is useful. This is the reading of nearly every modern English translation.

Every God-breathed Scripture is also profitable. The attributive reading. Here God-breathed modifies Scripture rather than being asserted of it, and the sentence makes one assertion — about usefulness — while treating the God-breathed character as already agreed. This was the reading of the Revised Version's margin and of a number of serious commentators, and the little word and sitting between the two adjectives is what gives it traction.

Two things should be said plainly. The difference is real, and a reader is entitled to know a choice was made. And it decides almost nothing.

The attributive reading does not create a category of non-God-breathed Scripture. It assumes the God-breathed character rather than asserting it, which is if anything a stronger presupposition. Paul is not arguing that Scripture is inspired. He is telling Timothy what to do with writings whose character neither man doubts.

A doctrine of Scripture built on winning that syntactic point would be built on sand. It does not need to be, because the assumption underneath both readings is identical.

There is a smaller question in the same phrase. Pasa graphē can be rendered all Scripture, the collection viewed whole, or every Scripture, each part distributively. Greek allows both. The distributive is at least as natural and is the more demanding claim, since it says of each part what the collective says only of the sum.

The church's own word

In two consecutive verses Paul uses two different expressions for the same books, and English hides it.

Verse 15: Timothy has known the hiera grammata — the sacred writings — from infancy. Verse 16: every graphē is God-breathed.

Hiera grammata was the standard phrase a Greek-speaking Jew used when describing his holy books to outsiders — the formal, almost bibliographic designation, the sort of thing written for a Roman audience. Graphē means, flatly, a writing, and in the New Testament it means the writings, with no adjective required. It is the word the church used among itself.

The move from one to the other is the move from describing a collection to living inside it. Timothy learned the sacred writings as a child. He now handles the Scripture.[15]

Graphē does something else worth noticing. It can act. Galatians 3:8 says the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, proclaimed the gospel beforehand to Abraham. Scripture foresees and preaches. Romans 9:17 says the Scripture says to Pharaoh, where the words quoted are God's. The New Testament can put Scripture and God in the same slot, and that is itself a doctrinal datum.

One further curiosity. First Timothy 5:18 introduces two quotations with a single formula — the Scripture says — and cites Deuteronomy first and then a line that matches a saying of Jesus recorded in Luke. Some read this as an early instance of a gospel saying placed alongside the Law under the heading Scripture; others note that the second line was a current proverb and that the formula may govern only the first. The Greek does not settle it. What can be said is that 2 Peter 3:16 unmistakably applies the plural of this noun to Paul's own letters, so the phenomenon of apostolic writing being read as Scripture is visible inside the New Testament, whatever this verse is doing.[16]

Cutting straight

Rightly dividing the word of truth.

Almost every English-speaking Christian over a certain age knows the phrase, and almost everyone who knows it has a picture attached. The picture is of the Bible as something to be divided — sorted into parts, separated into categories, its contents distributed into their proper compartments by a reader skilled enough to know which piece goes where.

The verb does not mean divide.

Orthotomeō is orthos, straight, plus temnō, to cut. It means to cut a straight line. The object being cut is not being cut into pieces; it is being cut straight.

The Septuagint background is decisive and it is not obscure. The verb appears twice in the Greek Proverbs, both times of paths: acknowledge God in all your ways and he will make your paths straight; righteousness cuts straight the ways of the blameless. The image is of laying out a road correctly — cutting a way through terrain so that it runs true rather than meandering.

15. Graphē has a full entry in the free Greek Word Explorer at larryherzogjr.com, including its striking use as an agent — Scripture foreseeing and preaching.
16. On the formation of the canon — which books, on what grounds, and by what process the church came to recognize rather than confer their authority — see Ad Fontes: To the Sources.

Jerome renders the phrase rightly handling the word of truth. The English dividing enters through Tyndale — working from the Greek, not the Latin — and reaches its permanent form in the King James. The translators were not careless. The word moved under them.

And look at the context, which is the strongest argument of all. This verse does not stand in a discussion of hermeneutics. Verse 14 warns against fighting about words, which does no good and ruins the hearers. Verse 16 says to avoid empty chatter. Verse 17 says their message will spread like gangrene. Verse 18 names Hymenaeus and Philetus, who say the resurrection has already happened.

Cutting straight is what the workman does instead of word-fighting and empty noise. The contrast is not between careful exegesis and sloppy exegesis. It is between a man doing an honest job with the message and a man using it for something else. Paul's word for him is ergatēs, a laborer — someone paid for output — and the standard is that he not be ashamed of the work when it is inspected.

And the same correction runs the other way

Rightly dividing has been the textual anchor for a hermeneutic that divides Scripture into distinct administrations and assigns different portions to different peoples and eras. Whatever is to be said for or against that system on other grounds, it cannot be founded on this verb.[17]

But Lutherans have used this verse too, and honesty requires saying so in the same breath.

The proper distinction between law and gospel is the central hermeneutical commitment of confessional Lutheran theology, and 2 Timothy 2:15 has frequently been attached to it — in sermons, in classroom shorthand, in the English framing of the tradition's best-known treatment of the subject.

The distinction is true. It is not from this verse.

Saying so costs a convenient proof text and buys something worth more. The distinction rests where the Formula of Concord actually rests it: on the whole witness of Scripture to what the law does to a sinner and what the gospel does, on Romans and Galatians, on the plain evidence that God's Word addresses a person in two irreducibly different ways. The Formula makes its case from the function of the two words, not from a word that occurs once in a passage about people who argue too much.

17. The system built on this rendering is treated at length in the dispensationalism pillar essay at larryherzogjr.com; the argument is not repeated here.

A study that corrected one tradition's misuse of a verse while quietly protecting its own would not be doing word study. It would be doing team sport, and readers can tell. The whole method of this book is worth exactly as much as its willingness to apply the flag where it stings.

What the Confessions do with this

The Formula of Concord opens with a Rule and Norm that states the confessional Lutheran position without hedging: the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule and norm by which all teachers and teachings are to be judged. Creeds and confessions are witnesses; they testify how Scripture has been understood and defended, and their authority is derivative.

That is what sola Scriptura actually claims, and it is narrower and more defensible than the caricature. It does not say Scripture is the only source of any true statement, nor that tradition is worthless, nor that a reader with no history behind him will read well — the Formula is itself a document of the church interpreting Scripture in community, which would be self-refuting on the caricature. It says that when a dispute arises, one court has final jurisdiction. And the reason one text can have final jurisdiction is theopneustos.

Second, Lutheran theology puts unusual weight on the efficacy of the Word — not merely its truth. Scripture and preaching are not information about grace; they are means by which the Spirit delivers it. The breath image carries this. Breath is not a description of life. Breath is how life gets into a body.

Third, and this is the corrective the other two require: Scripture holds Christ, and is honored by being read for him.

Luther's image of Scripture as the cradle in which Christ lies is the necessary companion to a high doctrine of inspiration, because it is possible to hold the highest possible view of the Bible's origin and still read it as a rulebook — to venerate the cradle and never look at the child.

Paul's own sentence forbids it. Verse 15 says the sacred writings make wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. That purpose is stated before the inspiration claim, not after it. And John 5:39 is the sharpest warning in the New Testament about a high view of Scripture gone wrong: you search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life, and it is these that testify about me. The people addressed there are not skeptics. They are diligent readers who made the text terminal instead of testimonial.

Where people get it wrong

The first error is to make 2 Timothy 3:16 carry the whole doctrine of Scripture. It is one sentence, it assumes more than it argues, and the church's confidence in Scripture rests on far more than a single hapax.

The second is to hear God-breathed as dictation. The word says where Scripture came from. It says nothing about mechanism, and 2 Peter 1:21 — men carried along by the Holy Spirit — describes something that is neither dictation nor mere religious insight.

The third is to use orthotomeō as a license for systems, in whatever direction. The verb describes a workman doing a job accurately. It does not authorize a scheme.

The fourth, and the one this session presses hardest: quoting 2 Timothy 3:16 as though the point were the Bible, when verse 15 has already said the point is Christ.

So what

You are allowed to read your Bible for someone rather than for something.

A great many earnest Christians read Scripture the way a person reads a manual — looking for the applicable principle, the guidance for the decision, the instruction for the week. That is not nothing, and these letters plainly expect Scripture to be useful for teaching, reproof, correction, and training.

But the usefulness has an object, and the object is named before the usefulness is: wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. A person who finishes a chapter with a principle and no Christ has read accurately and missed the point, and no amount of care about inspiration will fix that.

And the workman image is a mercy. The standard in 2 Timothy 2:15 is not brilliance. It is a straight line, cut where it was supposed to go, by someone who did not take shortcuts on the parts nobody was going to check. That is a description of an ordinary faithful pastor, and an ordinary faithful teacher, and it is within reach.

If you want to go deeper

Read 2 Peter 1:19–21 alongside 2 Timothy 3:16. Theopneustos names the product; 2 Peter names the process, using a verb employed of a ship under sail. Neither text alone is sufficient and together they are remarkably restrained about mechanism.

Then read Luke 24 with the word Scripture marked. Three times in one chapter the risen Christ opens the Scriptures, and each time the content is himself.

And take up 1 Timothy 4:13 — the public reading of Scripture, exhortation, teaching. It is one of the earliest descriptions of what a Christian service consisted of, and the reading comes first.

Questions for discussion

1. Before this session, what did you think inspired meant? Has anything shifted?
2. Verse 15 states the purpose of Scripture before verse 16 states its origin. Why might Paul have put them in that order?
3. Rightly dividing has shaped how many people read the Bible. What would change if the verb means cut straight instead?
4. This session says the law-gospel distinction is true but not from this verse. Does it bother you to give up a proof text for something you believe? Why?
5. John 5:39 describes diligent readers who missed Christ. What would that look like in a Bible study today?

SESSION NINE

Conscience and Myths

1 Timothy 1:4, 19; 4:1–2, 7; 6:3–5, 20; 2 Timothy 2:14, 16–18, 23; 4:3–4; Titus 1:14–15; 3:9

Titus 1:14; 3:9

The Pastorals describe a conscience that has been cauterized.

Cauterizing was a real and common procedure in the ancient world — a heated instrument applied to tissue to stop bleeding, close a wound, or burn away what was diseased. It works. It is also a procedure that destroys the nerve endings in the tissue it treats.

A cauterized conscience does not hurt.

That is what makes 1 Timothy 4:2 so unsettling. The false teachers it describes are not men wrestling with guilt and pressing on anyway. They are men whose internal alarm has been burned out. Nothing is going off. And from the inside, a scarred conscience and a clean one feel remarkably similar — quiet.

This session takes the letters' diagnosis of how teaching goes wrong, and the diagnosis has a shape worth noticing in advance. It is not primarily about content. It is about appetite.

Knowing with yourself

Syneidēsis is syn, with, plus the root of oida, to know — the verb synoida means to share knowledge, and with oneself as the other party it is exactly this. A knowing-with — knowing something along with oneself, being a party to one's own case. The Latin conscientia is a precise calque and English conscience preserves it.

Whatever else conscience is in the New Testament, its first meaning is structural. A person can stand at a slight distance from himself and give evidence.[18]

Two things should be said about where the word came from, because they are usually left out.

18. The word has a full entry in the free Greek Word Explorer at larryherzogjr.com under the spelling sun-eidesis, covering the weak-conscience material of 1 Corinthians 8 and 10 that this session sets aside.

First, this is not a Hebrew concept word wearing Greek clothes. The Old Testament has no single term for conscience and the Septuagint barely uses this noun. It belongs to Greek moral thought, where the Stoics in particular had developed it as the faculty by which a person observes and judges his own conduct.

Second, Paul takes the word up — roughly twenty of its thirty New Testament occurrences are his — and does something to it that Stoic usage does not. He denies that it is the final court.

The clearest statement is not in these letters. I am not aware of anything against myself, Paul writes to Corinth, but I am not acquitted because of this. The one who judges me is the Lord.

The conscience reports. It does not sentence, and it does not acquit.

A patient, not a faculty

The Pastorals almost never use the noun bare. It is good, or clean, or cauterized, or defiled. Conscience in these letters is less a faculty being discussed than a patient being examined — which puts it directly in the medical vocabulary of Session Two.

First Timothy 1:5 is the verse that should govern how the rest of this session is read: the aim of our instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith.

The word is telos — the goal, the point. The goal of the whole charge Timothy has been given is not correct opinions. It is love, from three named sources, of which conscience is one. Everything harsh that follows in these letters is in service of that sentence.

First Timothy 1:19 gives the sequence of collapse: keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and so have suffered shipwreck in regard to the faith.

The verb rejected is apōtheō, to push away — a deliberate shove, not a drift. And the consequence is nauageō, shipwreck. Note the order Paul assumes: the conscience is thrust aside first, and the faith founders after. The doctrinal collapse is downstream of a moral one.

That is a claim worth sitting with, because it runs against the way we usually narrate these things. We tend to assume people believe wrongly and then live wrongly. Paul, at least here, assumes the reverse.

And 1 Timothy 4:2 supplies the end state. The verb kaustēriazō has been read two ways: seared, so that sensation is lost, which is the dominant reading and fits the letters' sustained medical vocabulary; or branded, as slaves and criminals were branded with a hot

iron, marking ownership. Both are lexically available. The first is more likely; the second fits the immediate mention of deceitful spirits, and a reader who prefers it is not making an error.

The myths are Jewish

The Pastorals warn against myths four times, and every reader assumes he knows what is meant. Pagan stories. Gods behaving badly on mountaintops. The residue of a superstitious world the gospel came to displace.

Titus 1:14 says otherwise. The myths in view are Jewish ones.

Whatever these letters are worried about, it is not the local temple. It is speculation growing inside the household of faith — genealogies, disputes about the law, stories elaborating what Scripture leaves alone. The false teaching of the Pastorals is not an alien intrusion. It is homegrown, biblically literate, and produced by people who could quote the text.

That relocates the whole diagnosis, and it should relocate ours.

The word mythos had drifted. In Homer it means simply a word or a thing said, roughly interchangeable with logos. The two separated: logos became the reasoned account, the thing you can argue for, and mythos became the story you tell instead. By the Hellenistic period it carried, in intellectual usage, a settled tinge of the story people tell that is not so. All five New Testament occurrences are at that end.

The vocabulary of appetite

Around mythos the letters assemble a cluster of words that no English translation lets you see as a group. Set out together they are unsparing and strangely modern.

Genealogia — genealogy. Paired with mythos at 1 Timothy 1:4, and with disputes and quarrels about the law at Titus 3:9 — which tells you the kind of speculation in view: elaborations built out of the biblical text's own furniture.

Kenophōnia — empty sound, vacuous talk. Literally empty-voicing.

Logomachia — word-battle, fighting about words.

Zētēsis — inquiry, controversy. The word for a question, used of the practice of generating them.

Typhoō — to be puffed up. The root means smoke, and the image is of a man inflated with vapor. It is the letters' diagnosis of what the myth-appetite does to a person: fills him with nothing, visibly.

And the fullest statement is 2 Timothy 4:3–4. For there will be a time when people will not tolerate sound teaching. Instead, following their own desires, they will accumulate teachers for themselves, because they have an insatiable curiosity to hear new things. And they will turn away from hearing the truth, and turn aside to myths.

Four verbs, all describing the hearers. They will not tolerate. They will accumulate. They will turn away. They will turn aside. The teachers in that sentence are supplied on demand; the market is demand-driven.

The word is defined by contrast in one place outside these letters, and it is the place that makes it land. Second Peter says: we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ; we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. The apostolic claim is specifically a claim not to be doing this.[19]

A caution about a modern word

Since the nineteenth century, myth has also been used as a technical term in the study of religion — not meaning falsehood but meaning a narrative carrying a community's fundamental convictions. That is a legitimate scholarly usage and it is not what the New Testament means.

Confusing the two produces bad arguments in both directions: readers who think Scripture has pre-emptively condemned an academic method, and readers who think the apostles were relaxed about whether the events happened. Neither follows. The claim in 2 Peter 1:16 is a claim about eyewitnesses, which is a claim about history.

What the Confessions do with this

The terrified conscience is where Lutheran theology starts, and this is unusual enough among the Reformation traditions to be worth stating plainly.

The Augsburg Confession and the Apology return again and again to the conscience thoroughly frightened, and it is not a rhetorical flourish. It is the anthropological starting point. The Apology's argument for justification by faith is built on the question of what

19. Second Peter builds its own argument out of this vocabulary. See The Knowledge of Him, the companion Greek word study of 2 Peter, on 1:16 and on the eyewitness claim.

actually gives a terrified conscience peace, and its objection to the medieval penitential system is precisely that the system left consciences without certainty.

That framing shapes everything downstream. Justification in the Confessions is not primarily an answer to a metaphysical question about how a holy God can accept sinners. It is an answer to a pastoral one: what can a frightened person be told that is both true and sufficient.

Which leads to the distinction this session exists for. A quiet conscience is not self-authenticating, and neither is a loud one.

Against the confident: a clear conscience proves nothing. Paul says so about his own. A man can be entirely at ease and entirely wrong, and that is what a cauterized conscience is.

Against the tormented: an accusing conscience is also not the verdict — and this half is the more important pastorally. A conscience that will not stop accusing after absolution has been pronounced is not thereby reporting the truth about a person's standing before God. The absolution is the truth. The conscience is a witness whose testimony has been overruled by the judge, and the Christian is entitled — commanded, really — to believe the judge.

That is the practical difference between a conscience quieted by absolution and one quieted by scar tissue. Both are quiet. One is quiet because the wound was closed by burning; the other because someone with authority said the words your sins are forgiven, and the words were true.

Finally: conscience is bound, not autonomous. Luther's statement at Worms is routinely quoted as a charter of individual conscience against institutional authority, and it says nearly the opposite. His conscience, he said, was captive to the Word of God. Bound. Captive to something outside himself, not sovereign over the question.

That is the confessional doctrine of conscience in a phrase. The conscience is not a private oracle and it is not an authority. It is a witness that must be informed, and what informs it is external — the Word, preached and applied. Which is why the answer to a diseased conscience in these letters is never introspection. It is teaching, and it is absolution, and both come from outside the person entirely.

Where people get it wrong

The first error is to read this session as a description of other people. Second Timothy 4:3 locates the pathology in hearers who collect teachers to suit desires they already have,

and that market is not restricted to the heterodox. A congregation can accumulate teachers who confirm what it already thinks while every teacher accumulated is doctrinally impeccable.

The second is to use conscience as a trump. It is a witness. Paul refused to treat even his own as a verdict, and the Confessions treat an accusing conscience after absolution as something to be answered rather than obeyed.

The third is to hear the warning against controversy as a warning against disagreement. These same letters command an elder to refute those who contradict. What is condemned is the appetite — wanting the fight, generating the questions, being filled with smoke.

The fourth is to forget who is speaking. The man writing about false teachers has already called himself the foremost of sinners, in the present tense, in the same letter. A session on the pathology of false teaching that leaves the reader feeling well has been read badly.

So what

Watch what you are hungry for.

The letters' diagnosis is not that false teachers are persuasive. It is that people want something, and the teaching arrives to meet the want. That is a more uncomfortable account than the usual one, because it means the defense is not chiefly vigilance about doctrine. It is honesty about appetite.

Some questions worth asking yourself, and not out loud. When you read theology, are you looking for something to be true or for something to be confirmed? When a controversy appears, does part of you brighten? After an argument about the faith, are you closer to the person you argued with, or further, and did you notice?

And the other half, for a different reader. If your conscience will not go quiet, the answer this session offers is not that you should try harder to feel forgiven. It is that your conscience is a witness and not the judge, that the verdict has already been pronounced by someone with the authority to pronounce it, and that you are permitted to believe him over yourself.

If you want to go deeper

Read 1 Corinthians 8 and 10 on the weak conscience. Paul's treatment there complicates any simple account: a conscience can be wrong, the scruple is not binding on the strong, and it must still be respected, because acting against one's own conscience is destructive even when the conscience is misinformed.

Then read Hebrews 9:14 and 10:22 on consciences cleansed and hearts sprinkled clean, and 1 Peter 3:21, which ties conscience directly to baptism and connects this session to Session Six.

And read Jude alongside 2 Peter with the false-teacher vocabulary marked. Three New Testament writers, three idioms, one pathology.

Questions for discussion

1. Paul says the conscience is thrust aside first and the faith founders after. Have you seen that order? Does it match how you would have told the story?
2. A cauterized conscience feels the same as a clean one — quiet. How would a person tell the difference in himself?
3. The myths in view are Jewish, not pagan. What does homegrown speculation look like in a church that takes the Bible seriously?
4. Second Timothy 4:3 describes people who collect teachers to match their desires. What do you go looking for?
5. If your conscience accuses you after you have been absolved, who is right? How do you act on that answer?

SESSION TEN

The Appearing

1 Timothy 6:14; 2 Timothy 1:10; 4:1, 6–8; Titus 2:11–13

The rest of the New Testament, speaking of Christ's return, mostly says parousia — arrival, presence, the coming. The Pastorals say epiphaneia.

That is a preference and not an accident. But the more interesting thing is not that the word is preferred. It is that it is used twice over — of the appearing that has already happened and of the appearing still to come.

Second Timothy 1:10 says that God's grace has now been revealed through the epiphaneia of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death. Second Timothy 4:8 says a crown is laid up for all who have loved his epiphaneia. Same word. One backward, one forward.

Which means the Christian, in the vocabulary of these letters, lives between two appearings. Something has already been shown. Something remains to be shown. The whole span of the church's life falls in the gap.

And a gap between a departure and a return is precisely the interval across which a deposit is guarded. This study began with a man leaving goods with his neighbor. It ends with the same shape seen from the other side.

A shining-forth

Epiphaneia is epi, upon or toward, plus the root of phainō, to shine or become visible. A shining-forth, a becoming-visible upon a scene. English epiphany comes directly from it, and the church's feast of the Epiphany names the same idea: God made visible.

Six New Testament occurrences. Five are in these letters.

The verb epiphainō does the same work twice in Titus, and both are hinges. Titus 2:11: the grace of God appeared. Titus 3:4: the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared. In each case an appearing is what changes the situation, and in each case the subject is God.

The word had two settled uses in the Hellenistic world, and both are audible here.

The first is religious: the visible intervention of a god, especially a rescue — a deity showing up in a crisis. Inscriptions record such appearings with gratitude.

The second is political: the ceremonial arrival of a king or emperor in a city, an event of enormous public significance with its own protocols of welcome. The Seleucid king Antiochus IV took Epiphanēs as a title, meaning the manifest one — which is why the books of Maccabees are worth having read before this word.

So when these letters speak of the appearing of our great God and Savior, they use a word a first-century reader associated with divine rescue and with imperial arrival, and apply it to a Galilean the empire executed. The word choice is a claim.

The appearing that already happened

Second Timothy 1:10 is the only place in the New Testament where this noun is used of Christ's first coming, and it should not be passed over: the word usually reserved for the end is applied to what has already occurred.

But now made visible through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who has broken the power of death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Two verbs of visibility are stacked — made visible, brought to light — and the word used of what happened to death is katargeō: rendered inoperative, put out of commission, deprived of force.

The first appearing did not postpone death. It decommissioned it. Christians still die, and the letters know that perfectly well; the man writing this one is expecting to. What has been removed is death's standing, and the difference between a defeated enemy and an abolished one is the whole content of Christian hope at a funeral.

The interval, and the school

Titus 2:11–13 gives the shape of the Christian life in three verses, and the shape is bounded at both ends by an appearing.

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all people. It trains us to reject godless ways and worldly desires and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, as we wait for the happy fulfillment of our hope in the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Grace appeared — past. We wait for the appearing — future. And everything in between is described as training. The Christian present is not a holding pattern. It is a school, and it is located.

The phrase makaria elpis — blessed or happy hope — deserves a note, because English hope has weakened. In ordinary modern usage hope means wishing without knowing. In this vocabulary it means confident expectation of something promised. The hope is happy not because the outcome is likely but because the one who promised it has already appeared once.

Our great God and Savior

The Greek of Titus 2:13 follows a construction sometimes called the Granville Sharp rule: when a single article governs two singular, personal, non-proper nouns joined by and, the two nouns refer to the same person. Here one article governs God and Savior, with Jesus Christ standing in apposition. On that reading — how most modern translations render it — the verse calls Jesus our great God and Savior outright. Older translations sometimes rendered it as two persons, and a reader with a King James in hand will find it that way; the construction is the argument, and it is a strong one, but the question was real.[20]

Session Five traced how Titus alternates the title Savior between the Father and the Son, three times in three chapters. Here the alternation stops. The two are said together, of one person, in the letter that has been preparing the reader for it since chapter one.

The last paragraph

Second Timothy 4:6–8 is the closing text of this study, and it is the last extended thing Paul wrote.

For I am already being poured out as an offering, and the time for me to depart is at hand. I have competed well; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith. Finally the crown of righteousness is reserved for me. The Lord, the righteous Judge, will award it to me in that day — and not to me only, but also to all who have set their affection on his appearing.

The first verb is spendō; the form here is the middle, spendomai, of a drink offering poured out at the base of an altar. Paul describes his death as a liturgical act already in progress.

Then three images. Agōn, the contest — the word behind English agony, and it means a struggle with an outcome. Dromos, the race course, a distance with an end. Stephanos, the victor's wreath, not a royal crown.

20. The identical construction appears at 2 Peter 1:1 and the two verses should be studied together. See The Knowledge of Him.

And then two things that keep the paragraph from being a boast.

The crown is apokeitai — laid up, stored, put away by someone else. It is not being earned in the sentence; it is already somewhere, waiting.

And the Lord apodōsei — will award it. Paul is the recipient of both verbs. He describes a gift already in safekeeping, waiting for a day.

There is one more word, and it closes the circle. I have kept the faith: the verb is tetērēka, and the noun that was kept has been called, in this same letter, a parathēkē.

This study began with a man leaving goods with a neighbor and going away. It ends with the neighbor at the end of the interval, holding out what he was given, waiting for the owner.

What the Confessions do with this

First, the blessed hope is a promise rather than a forecast.

The Pastorals show no interest in sequence, timing, or signs, which is striking given how much of popular eschatology is built on those questions. What these letters say about the future is that Christ will appear, that he will judge, and that a crown is laid up. That is a promise attached to a person.

Confessional Lutheran eschatology is correspondingly thin on architecture and heavy on the promise. The Augsburg Confession's article on Christ's return is a few lines: he will return to judge, to raise the dead, to give the godly eternal life. The same article rejects the expectation of a golden age on earth before the resurrection. What the Confessions decline to do is build a timetable, and the Pastorals' own restraint is one reason why.

Second, the crown is a gift in the passive voice, and the grammar is the guard.

Second Timothy 4:8 is the New Testament verse most available for misuse, and the Formula of Concord's care about good works applies exactly here. Paul has fought, finished, and kept — three active verbs, real works, genuinely his. And the crown is laid up and will be given. The Confessions insist on holding both without letting the first become the ground of the second, and this is the passage where holding both is hardest and most necessary. Paul's works are named. They are not the reason.

And the crown is not his alone. It is for all who have loved the appearing. Whatever distinguished Paul's course, the promise is not restricted to people who ran one like it — which is a mercy for every Christian whose life has contained no imprisonment, no shipwreck, and no last letter.

Third, loving the appearing is the test of the whole book.

The verb is agapaō, and it is an odd thing to say about a future event. But it makes sense of everything these letters have been driving at.

A man who has treated the faith as a possession to defend will not love the appearing; he will find in it, at best, a vindication. A man who supposed godliness was a means of gain has no reason to want the accounts opened. A conscience that has been cauterized cannot want the light.

But a man who received something he did not generate, kept it as well as he could, handed it on to others, and is now near the end of the interval has every reason to love the moment when the owner comes back.

Where people get it wrong

The first error is to treat the blessed hope as a subject for calculation. These letters give no timetable and their author expected to die before the appearing.

The second is to read 2 Timothy 4:7–8 as a summary of a life well lived, applicable to the exceptional. The paragraph itself refuses that: not to me only, but to all who loved his appearing.

The third is to hear I have kept the faith as an achievement rather than a discharge of trust. The verb belongs to the deposit vocabulary, and a man who returns what he was given has not accomplished something; he has finished something.

The fourth is to make loving the appearing a matter of enthusiasm about eschatology. The letters attach it to how a person has held the deposit, not to how interested he is in the end.

So what

You are living in the interval, and that is the whole of it.

Something has already appeared. Grace, and kindness, and love toward humanity — and death has been decommissioned, whatever it still looks like from here. Something is still to appear, and it is a person rather than an event.

Between those two, you have been handed something that is not yours, and you are asked to keep it and pass it on. That is the entire assignment. It is not a large one, in the sense of being complicated. It is only long.

And the question the last verse leaves is not whether you have done enough. It is a stranger one, and worth sitting with: do you love his appearing?

A person can answer that honestly without knowing much theology. Would you be glad to see him?

If you want to go deeper

Read 2 Peter 1:1 alongside Titus 2:13. The same construction, in two letters, both calling Jesus God and Savior in a single phrase. The companion study on 2 Peter takes it up.

Then read the whole of 2 Timothy 4 in one sitting, including the parts nobody quotes — the cloak left at Troas, the books and the parchments, Demas who loved this present world, the names of people who stood by and people who did not. The paragraph about the crown sits in the middle of that, and it reads differently there.

And go back to Session One and read 2 Timothy 1:12 again with this session in view: he is able to guard what has been entrusted, until that day. Both ends of the interval are in one verse.

Questions for discussion

1. The Pastorals use one word for both comings. What does it change to think of the incarnation and the return as the same kind of event?
2. Titus 2 calls the present age a training. What are you being trained in at the moment, and by what?
3. Paul says the crown is laid up and the Lord will give it. Why does the grammar matter?
4. Do you love his appearing? Answer honestly before you answer theologically.
5. Looking back over the ten sessions: what is in the deposit? Try it again in three sentences, and compare it with what you said in Session One.

Index of Greek Words

Every Greek term treated in this study, alphabetically by transliteration, with the session in which it is treated. Roots and component words glossed in passing are not listed separately. Words marked Explorer have a fuller free entry in the Greek Word Explorer at larryherzogjr.com/greek/, with their wider New Testament range, Septuagint background, and confessional treatment. Where a word is treated in more than one session, the session that opens it is listed first.

agapaō (ἀγαπάω) — to love · Session Ten

agōn (ἀγών) — contest, struggle · Session Ten

anakainōsis (ἀνακαίνωσις) — renewal · Session Six

anazōpyreō (ἀναζωπυρέω) — to rekindle, fan into flame · Session Seven

anenklētos (ἀνέγκλητος) — not accusable · Session Seven

anepilēmptos (ἀνεπίλημπτος) — above reproach; not able to be laid hold of · Session Seven

anēr (ἀνήρ) — man (male); husband · Session Five

anthrōpos (ἄνθρωπος) — human being · Session Five · Explorer

antilytron (ἀντίλυτρον) — a ransom in exchange · Session Five · Explorer

apodochē (ἀποδοχή) — acceptance, welcome · Session Three

apokeimai (ἀπόκειμαι) — to be laid up, stored · Session Ten

apolouō (ἀπολούω) — to wash away · Session Six

apolytrōsis (ἀπολύτρωσις) — redemption · Session Five · Explorer

apōtheō (ἀπωθέω) — to push away, thrust aside · Session Nine

asebeia (ἀσέβεια) — ungodliness · Session Four

authenteō (αὐθεντέω) — to exercise authority over; to domineer · Session Seven · Explorer

authentēs (αὐθέντης) — one who acts on his own authority · Session Seven

charis (χάρις) — grace, favor · Session Seven · Explorer

charisma (χάρισμα) — a gift of grace · Session Seven · Explorer

chrēstotēs (χρηστότης) — kindness · Session Six

diakonos (διάκονος) — servant, minister · Session Seven · Explorer

diathēkē (διαθήκη) — covenant · Session Five · Explorer

didaktikos (διδακτικός) — able to teach · Session Seven

didaskalia (διδασκαλία) — teaching — the act and the content · Session Two · Explorer

dikaioō (δικαιόω) — to justify · Session Six · Explorer

dromos (δρόμος) — race course · Session Ten

elpis (ἐλπίς) — hope, confident expectation · Session Ten · Explorer

emphysaō (ἐμφυσάω) — to breathe into · Session Eight

epignōsis alētheias (ἐπίγνωσις ἀληθείας) — knowledge of the truth · Session Five

epiphainō (ἐπιφαίνω) — to appear, show oneself · Session Ten

epiphaneia (ἐπιφάνεια) — an appearing, a manifestation · Session Ten · Explorer

episkopos (ἐπίσκοπος) — overseer · Session Seven · Explorer

epithesis tōn cheirōn (ἐπίθεσις τῶν χειρῶν) — the laying on of hands · Session Seven

ergatēs (ἐργάτης) — workman, laborer · Session Eight

eusebeia (εὐσέβεια) — godliness, reverence toward God · Session Four · Explorer
eusebeō (εὐσεβέω) — to show reverence · Session Four
gangraina (γάγγραινα) — gangrene · Session Two
genealogia (γενεαλογία) — genealogy · Session Nine
gramma (γράμμα) — a letter, a written character · Session Eight
graphē (γραφή) — a writing; Scripture · Session Eight · Explorer
gymnazō (γυμνάζω) — to train, exercise · Session Four
heterodidaskaleō (ἑτεροδιδασκαλέω) — to teach a different thing · Session Two
hēsychia (ἡσυχία) — quietness, settledness · Session Seven
hiera grammata (ἱερὰ γράμματα) — the sacred writings · Session Eight
homologia (ὁμολογία) — confession · Session Three · Explorer
homologoumenōs (ὁμολογουμένως) — confessedly, by common admission · Session Four
hygiainō (ὑγιαίνω) — to be healthy, to be sound · Session Two · Explorer
hygiēs (ὑγιής) — healthy, whole · Session Two
hypotypōsis (ὑποτύπωσις) — a pattern, outline, model · Session Two
kalodidaskalos (καλοδιδάσκαλος) — a teacher of what is good · Session Two
katargeō (καταργέω) — to render inoperative, decommission · Session Ten
kaustēriazō (καυστηριάζω) — to cauterize, to brand · Session Nine
kenophōnia (κενοφωνία) — empty talk · Session Nine
knēthō (κνήθω) — to itch, tickle · Session Two
logomachia (λογομαχία) — word-battle · Session Nine
logos (λόγος) — a word, a saying, an account · Session Three · Explorer
loutron (λουτρόν) — a bath; the water washing happens in · Session Six · Explorer
louō (λούω) — to bathe the whole body · Session Six
lytron (λύτρον) — a ransom price · Session Five · Explorer
lytroō (λυτρόω) — to redeem, to ransom · Session Five
makaria elpis (μακαρία ἐλπίς) — the blessed hope · Session Ten
mesitēs (μεσίτης) — mediator, go-between · Session Five · Explorer
mias gynaikos andra (μιᾶς γυναικὸς ἄνδρα) — a one-woman man · Session Seven
morphōsis (μόρφωσις) — an outward form or shape · Session Four
mystērion (μυστήριον) — mystery · Session Four · Explorer
mythos (μῦθος) — a tale, a fable, a fabrication · Session Nine · Explorer
nauageō (ναυαγέω) — to be shipwrecked · Session Nine
niptō (νίπτω) — to wash a part — hands, feet, face · Session Six
noseō (νοσέω) — to be sick · Session Two
orthos (ὀρθός) — straight, upright · Session Eight
orthotomeō (ὀρθοτομέω) — to cut straight; to handle rightly · Session Eight · Explorer
paideuō (παιδεύω) — to train, instruct as a schoolmaster · Session Four
palingenesia (παλιγγενεσία) — rebirth, regeneration · Session Six · Explorer
paradidōmi (παραδίδωμι) — to hand over — the tradition verb · Session One

paradosis (παράδοσις) — tradition; the thing handed over · Session One · Explorer
paralambanō (παραλαμβάνω) — to receive · Session One
parathēkē (παραθήκη) — a deposit entrusted for safekeeping · Session One · Explorer
paratithēmi (παρατίθημι) — to place beside; to entrust · Session One
parousia (παρουσία) — presence, arrival · Session Ten · Explorer
philanthrōpia (φιλανθρωπία) — love toward humanity · Session Six
phylakē (φυλακή) — a prison; a watch of the night · Session One
phylassō (φυλάσσω) — to guard, keep watch over · Session One
pistis (πίστις) — faith, trust · Session Three · Explorer
pistos ho logos (πιστὸς ὁ λόγος) — the saying is trustworthy · Session Three · Explorer
plynō (πλύνω) — to wash objects, especially clothing · Session Six
pneuma (πνεῦμα) — breath, wind, spirit · Session Eight · Explorer
porismos (πορισμός) — a means of gain · Session Four
presbyterion (πρεσβυτέριον) — the council of elders · Session Seven
presbyteros (πρεσβύτερος) — elder · Session Seven · Explorer
rhēma (ῥῆμα) — a spoken word, an utterance · Session Six · Explorer
sebastos (σεβαστός) — revered — the title Augustus · Session Four
sōphrōn (σώφρων) — self-controlled; a mind in right order · Session Seven
sōtēr (σωτήρ) — savior, deliverer · Session Five · Explorer
sōzō (σῴζω) — to save, rescue, heal, preserve · Session Five · Explorer
spendō (σπένδω) — to pour out as a drink offering · Session Ten
stephanos (στέφανος) — a victor's wreath · Session Ten
syneidēsis (συνείδησις) — conscience; knowing-with · Session Nine · Explorer
synoida (σύνοιδα) — to share knowledge; to be conscious of · Session Nine
tēreō (τηρέω) — to keep, to guard · Session Ten
theopneustos (θεόπνευστος) — God-breathed · Session Eight · Explorer
typhoō (τυφόω) — to be puffed up — literally, smoked up · Session Nine
zētēsis (ζήτησις) — controversy, dispute · Session Nine

A closing note

The index above runs to about a hundred words. The deposit Paul told Timothy to guard is not a hundred words long.

What the vocabulary does is show where the weight falls. Count how many of these terms are about Christ — the mediator, the ransom, the Savior, the appearing, the washing that saves — and how many are about the church's own arrangements. Then read 1 Timothy 3:16 one more time, and notice that when Paul stopped to define the mystery of godliness, he quoted six lines about somebody else.

That is what was handed over. Guard it by handing it on.